

NOTICE.—Accompanying this Number is a fac-simile of a Water-Colour Sketch by Miss Elizabeth Thompson, the Painter of the "Roll Call," entitled, "MISSED!" a Bengal Lancer playing at Tent-Pegging. A New Story by R. D. Blackmore, entitled, "CRIPPS THE CARRIER," will be commenced on Jan. 1, and continued weekly. The Postage of this Number throughout the United Kingdom is 2d.

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An Odd Couple.

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"The Minister's Wife," &c.

CHAPTER I.

HE; AND SHE

"IN that case, perhaps, it would be better that we should part."

These ominous words were said very steadily and precisely, but with a certain sense of nervous excitement in the utterance, by Mr. Charles Tremenehere, one morning in November, in his own drawing-room, and were, I need scarcely say, addressed to his own wife. To whom else could they have been said? He was not the kind of man who might have been expected to speak words striking at the very root of family existence, being, indeed, a very orderly and respectable personage,—anything but a revolutionary. The amount of provocation which he had endured before he said them need not be entered into here. He had been married about ten years, and had two children, a boy of nine and a girl of seven. Mrs. Tremenehere was seated opposite to him at a small work-table knitting, with a composure which was aggravating to the last degree. Her needles met each other with tranquil regularity, and not a single dropped stitch or irregular line bore witness to any excitement of feeling. They were middle-aged people, and might very well have been married twenty years instead of ten. He was standing in the favourite attitude of Englishmen, in front of the fire, a thin angular man, moving with a certain jerkiness and rapidity, slightly bald, with refined features, and hair growing grey, and looking very much what he was, a clerk in a public office, much more experienced and learned in the country's business than was in general the distinguished "chief" at the head of the department, though he was a Minister of State and probably a Grand Seigneur, Knight of the Garter, and everything that was splendid,—while his instructor and referee who kept him out of mischief was only Mr. Charles Tremenehere. Nevertheless, the injustice in this respect was more apparent than real, for Mr. Tremenehere was a man as well known in those high regions from which the country is ruled as the Queen herself, and most people whose opinion he cared about were perfectly acquainted with the real standing of which the vulgar knew nothing. "Tremenehere will keep him right," the Premier himself said when he appointed the rising man of the day Secretary of State for that department. Indeed, I need not tell you, dear reader, which department it was. It is in very good hands and does not require our interference, and it is enough for the purpose of the narrative that you should know who this gentleman was. He had been very much in society in his younger days, and still kept up his old friends, though his wife, whose taste was somewhat different from his own, had separated him from the tide of fashion; and he loved society, judging men and things by the standard in favour there, and making but small account of qualities which were not appreciated in these finest circles. This was a grave ground of debate between his wife and himself. They did not quarrel according to the ordinary pattern of conjugal quarrels. She was not a scold nor he a villain; he behaved as a gentleman should and she like a well-bred woman. But they differed incessantly, continually, with the heat of people who quarrel about convictions, a thing more persistent than the light differences which arise on every-day subjects; and so at last it had come to this—"Perhaps in that case it would be better that we should part."

Mr. Tremenehere felt when he said this that he had discharged his last volley. What more could he say or do? and he expected it to startle and appal his calm antagonist. He thought that an utterance so trenchant, so final, would penetrate through all her defences, and make her feel what it was to defy a man who was her natural head, her social representative. Almost he expected to see the common appeal of womanhood which he had read of in books, and which everybody, so far as he knew (who was not married to Mrs. Tremenehere), believed in. Mrs. Tremenehere had never yet met to him nor pleaded for forgiveness. She had never broken down under any of his reproaches—never been melted into helplessness by his appeals. Would she do it now—would she cry—would she throw herself at his feet or on his neck and ask him to take back that cruel suggestion? Inevitably it must bring her to herself.

But, indeed, the result was not as he anticipated. Mrs. Tremenehere bore the shock with wonderful composure. She scarcely raised her head; she scarcely paused in her knitting. She allowed him to speak as calmly as if he had been saying, "I will dine at my club." And then there followed an interval of silence which was as if the spheres stood still to Mr. Tremenehere. His eyes were upon her, but she did not look at him. Was it that she did not dare to look at him? Was it her pride which kept her eyes on her knitting, her head bowed down? or one or the other it must be.

But if she did not feel the shock, he did, when Mrs. Tremenehere raising her head and looking at him, without any of the excitement in her eyes which blinded his, replied quietly, "I have no doubt, as things have gone so far, that it would be the best—in every way."

"Good God, Ada," he said in sudden horror. "What do you mean?"

"It is not what I mean, Mr. Tremenehere. I have not taken any initiative. We do not agree unfortunately, or think alike in anything; but it was not I who called attention to this. I had made up my mind to go on and make the best of it. But when you see it so clearly I feel that it would be foolish to contradict you. Yes," she said with a sigh; "it is a pity, but I think you are right; and separation would be the best."

"You think so!" he said, furious. "Oh, you think so! Good heavens! and this is what it is to end in, after all that has come and gone!"

"It was not I who suggested it," she said, resuming her knitting; "but since you think so, dear—"

"Dear! dear comes in well in such a discussion," said the husband furiously. He left the fire and strode across to the window, and stood gazing out with his back to her. The sight of her composure made him wild. "If we are to arrange this let it be without any pretence of false affection. Conventional humbug may at least be put away now."

"I am never conventional that I know of," she said, slightly roused. "We do not agree, Charles; but why should we hate each other? It is this that would be conventional, not an innocent word."

"Oh, confound your innocent words," he muttered through his teeth; but this she did not hear, nor was she intended to hear it. He could hear the slight stir of her needles where he stood looking out upon the rolling of the fog which now lifted a

little, now came down heavier. Nothing could be more doleful than the prospect out-of-doors. Hyde Park, which was opposite, threw up a line of spectral trees into the yellow of the atmosphere. The passengers surrounded themselves upon the greasy pavement, the horses of a mediæval saint; with a halo of white breath like the nimbus of a saint; the kind of day from which you shrink and turn to the cheerful fire within; but to poor Mr. Tremenehere the fog itself was more cheerful than the genial blaze near which his wife sat in her warm velvet dress, the impersonation of domestic comfort. How comfortable she looked! He saw her very well though his back was turned. With a maternity fulness of person,—not too much, only enough to be becoming,—light brown hair, not changed or touched by time, and a great deal more abundant than is usual nowadays. It seemed suddenly to flash upon him how changed the room would look without her, and the house and all his daily life. Was it possible that she could be so hard hearted, so cruel, so blind to every duty? If it had not been his own suggestion he would have turned round and laughed in her face. She got away after ten years' companionship and quarrelling! Quarrelling when it is continuous and familiar endears just as much as anything else. She could not think of it. It must be a bit of bravado to frighten him and make him give in on the subject they had disagreed upon. Women were bad enough; but they were not so bad, not so heartless as this. So Mr. Tremenehere considered that the wisest thing he could do was to show the impatience but not the uneasiness he felt, and to rush off to the office where he ought to have been some time ago, but for the disagreement which had brought matters all at once and unexpectedly to a crisis so terrible.

"I am aware that you have plenty of time to talk," he said, "but I have not. I am off to the office. You have detained me too long already with this ridiculous discussion. Why should we have these continual misunderstandings? I advise you to put folly out of your head, and try to find some way by which we can get on like other people. I shall be back at seven to-night."

And he turned round and looked at her. Surely at least she would show some natural feeling now. But she did not. She bent her head a little and said, "Very well, good morning," and went on with her knitting. Good morning! Good heavens! What did she mean by that "good morning"? Was it anxiety? Was it determination? He would rather have seen her eyes, and then he might have known what she meant. But he would not resign the superior position he had assumed by waiting to see what her eyes meant. He had to go as he said, shutting the door with some energy behind him. He stumbled over the children at the door, and, instead of stopping to kiss them, as was his wont, pushed the little things away, who were all done up in their winter gear, great coats and furs.

"Is this a day to take the children out? Go back to the nursery at once," he said, not stopping to hear what the nurse, indignant, said about Missis. Missis! what was she that she must argue about everything, instead of taking her husband's opinion like other people?—when of course he must know best; he a man of the world. But Mr. Tremenehere went to the office that day with a heavy heart. He had "shot an arrow into the air," and he did not know where he should find that inadvertent missile. And all without meaning it! meaning nothing more than to frighten her; to show her what terrors might be if she did not mind what she was about—to warn her of possibilities which perhaps had never dawned upon her before.

Mrs. Tremenehere, however, was much more startled by her husband's suggestion than she allowed to appear; but scarcely in the way a wife might be supposed to be startled. It was not the fear of lost love or any sentimental disturbance which was in her mind. There are wives, and even some whose married life is not particularly harmonious, to whom such words would be as the rending asunder of heaven and earth; but this lady was not one of them. She did not feel the soil crumbling under her feet or the skies dividing over her head because her husband threw out the suggestion, that probably they might be better apart. She was not wounded in this profound and poignant way, but she was startled by the sudden introduction to her of a new idea, a something previously unthought of which was evidently worthy of thought. And perhaps she was a little piqued and slightly stung in her pride that the idea had not originated with herself. Even the most philosophical woman, she who has least care to preserve the often humiliating privileges of sex, has a kind of prejudice in favour of all such suggestions originating with herself. That her husband should be able calmly to contemplate a separation did not throw her into hysterics or into despair, but yet she should have liked to have been the first to suggest the separation. When, however, she had got over this she was seriously struck by the new idea. Separation? it meant a great deal which Mrs. Tremenehere had never considered before, and which she began to consider with the seriousness which became a very important matter. Living separate was easy enough to friends who perhaps might be better friends apart than if thrown continually together. It was nothing very dreadful even for members of the same family. Brothers and sisters separated continually, yet remained brotherly and sisterly all their lives; but a man and wife,—this was something totally different, involving a very great deal more. A separation of this sort is seldom considered in the reflective and calm spirit in which Mrs. Tremenehere regarded it. Usually it is decided upon in mere heat of passion, or under the sting of some intolerable wrong—and only when the misery of the two compelled to live together has become past bearing. All this was very different from her sentiments; she sat very still going on with her knitting, her needles perhaps moving a little more quickly than usual, and her eyes very intent upon what she was doing, until at last she dropped her work on her lap, letting fall the ball of wool with which she was knitting, and which a playful kitten from the hearthrug immediately sprang upon. The kitten thought her mistress had done it on purpose, and that this was an invitation to play, and purred loudly to show her satisfaction, arching her back and looking up into Mrs. Tremenehere's abstracted face as she put her foot upon the ball. It was a pretty Persian kitten with a long sweeping tail, and the room was very pretty, with harmonious furniture and fine water-colour drawings, a carefully selected collection, for both husband and wife prided themselves on knowing something about art. The chair upon which Mrs. Tremenehere sat was an elegant Chippendale, which she preferred to the usual luxurious articles of the drawing-room. The table by her side was spider-legged, and daintily carved in ebony. An old Italian cabinet in the same wood, inlaid with silver, stood against the wall behind. Careful thought and taste, and some amount of culture, showed in every part of the room. A bright fire blazed, throwing pleasant lights about, sparkling in the glasses of the old Venice chandelier, and doing its best to neutralise the effects of the fog without. When Mrs. Tremenehere dropped

her knitting in her lap she raised her head with a sigh and turned her eyes to the window, as it is so natural to do when one is in trouble. She was not young; but she was a handsome woman, with clear high features, blue eyes, and abundant hair—not fat, though that is the usual epithet to apply to a woman of forty, which was her age, but tall and of an imposing presence. And she was very well dressed in a dark velvet gown, which threw up her fairness, with old-fashioned ornaments such as betrayed the same prevailing taste as that which was apparent in the room. She was so entirely in keeping with the place that it may be supposed the idea of leaving it was not agreeable to her. But even this was not how the matter appeared at the present moment to Mrs. Tremenehere. She had not yet come so far as to think of leaving her home, or of any of the material consequences to follow, but was only startled into serious consideration of the idea and of what it meant, and if it really would be "best" as her husband had said.

She was asking herself this question when the nurse and child burst into the room in full walking array, as when Mr. Tremenehere had turned them back—every ribbon on nurse's bonnet (and there were a great many), and every hair on her head, though they were less abundant, was bristling with indignation. The little girl had her finger in her mouth, and was whimpering in sympathy. The boy, more indifferent, received imaginary balls upon the short hoop-stick which he held like a cricket-bat, and let the woman talk with masculine composure.

"Please ma'am, master-has-turned-us-back," said nurse, running all her words into one. "It's-a-fog-and-we-ain't-to-go-out-in-a-fog; and a deal of exercise the dear children will get in London if we don't never go out in fogs. I said as it was you, but he said as it was me, and gave 'em a push which it isn't like a gentleman," said the nurse out of breath; while little Vera, stamping her little foot, cried, "Naughty papa!"

"And master is as unreasonable as unreasonable, as well you knows, ma'am, though you mightn't say it," nurse added, before she could be stopped.

Mrs. Tremenehere coloured high, and when she flushed the colour remained, as she was well aware, on the ridge of her delicate high nose much longer than was becoming or agreeable, which made her still more angry. "You are very impatient to speak of your master so," she said. "Take the children's things off at once, and send them to me; and Vera, if you whimper you shall have a punishment. Go directly. I am very much displeased."

"It ain't us, ma'am, that you've occasion to be displeased with," nurse began. "It's Mr.—"

"Do you wish me to send you away at an hour's notice?" said Mrs. Tremenehere in a low voice, hastily rising from her chair and putting down the knitting with some impatience on the table, as she dismissed the party peremptorily. Was this the end of it all? She had meant well, as well as ever woman meant, or so at least she thought; but this was the end. A servant who ventured to appeal to her knowledge of her husband's unreasonableness—a child who felt itself justified in saying "Naughty papa." Was this what she had done, betraying herself and betraying him, bringing down the credit and good reputation which she was bound to preserve? Then indeed he was right, and it would be best for them to part.

She had, however, little time to pursue these reflections, for soon after the door again opened, and the little pair came back, Vera in a little velvet frock like her mother's, with the hair cut square on her forehead and falling behind upon her shoulders, leading the way,—Edly behind, still with the hoop-stick of which he made an imaginary cricket bat. Vera had a lapful of dolls in her pinafore—dolls without noses, without arms, with feet twisted off, with necks wrung, with hair torn from their heads, but only the dearest for all their misfortunes, as Otello was "for the dangers he had known." Vera tripped in light as a little fairy, her pretty hair streaming over her shoulders. She was one of those born actors who (up to the age of ten or so) are always consciously playing some rôle or other, and to-day her part was that of an anxious mother taking care of her offspring. The little creature took no notice of her own mother, who sat gazing at her with many thoughts in her heart, but seating herself on the other side of the fireplace began to arrange her family. She put her dolls round her like a class at school, setting them up to sit with their miserable legs thrust out on all the stools she could find, and then began to address them with busy gravity—now pulling a dress straight, now arranging a wig of tow. The busy little human thing among all these wooden counterfeits of herself was as curious a sight as one could wish to see. How she managed them, pulling this one roughly about, coaxing another, according to their character! and indeed there were to the child's lively imagination distinct traces of character in the very attitude of these ungainly babes.

"Try and sit up like a lady," she said, taking up unceremoniously one of her collected family by the head and setting it down again with a shake, "is that how a lady sits? If you are all good and don't make a noise, nor spoil your pinnies, I will tell you a story. Oh you disagreeable little fright, why can't you hold your toes straight? Now listen!" Vera held up a small finger in the air to enforce attention. "There was once a little girl, and she was sometimes naughty just like you, and she had a great many little children belonging to her, and one that was called Rose, and one that was called Violet, and one that was called Lily, just the same names as you have; ain't it strange? And this little girl had a mamma the same as you have, but she had a papa too, and you never had a papa. You hold your tongue, you naughty Rose. You want to know what a papa is like—you all want to know? Well, a papa is a very funny thing. Sometimes he is good and gives you new dolls, but I do not like any new dolls, the nicest that could be got, so much as I love you, you dear old dirty naughty ones; so be quiet and don't interfere ever again more. But then a papa is sometimes cross. He is very funny to look at, and doesn't wear frocks like us; and some of them have beards, great hairy things like your muffs stuck on to your chin, and when they kiss you it pricks. But that is not all. Now you shall hear about the little girl in the story. Once she met her papa when she was just going out for a walk, and her nurse was going to take her to the Baker Street Bazaar, and she was so happy; and what do you think this naughty, naughty, cross, unkind papa did?"

"Vera, what are you talking about?"

"I was not talking, mamma; I was only telling Rose and Violet and the rest, a story. I often tell them stories—like what you used to tell me—that begin—'There was once a little girl.' I never liked to hear about that little girl," said Vera, shaking her head; "she was always doing such silly things, and I knew she was me."

"Vera, it is very naughty either to your dolls, or any one, to talk so of your papa."

"My papa!" said Vera with well-feigned surprise. "I was only talking of the little girl's papa."

its long feather pushed off her forehead, everything perfect and carefully arranged about her, an example of luxury and warmth and comfort. But Vera, though she loved her best hat as a little woman ought, was not thinking of it for the moment. She stood on the threshold of the room and searched it with widening eyes of wonder and anxiety and dismay. The changes on her little countenance amused the visitor, who had stopped short in her speech to look at the child. All expectation, pleasure, and brightness, just clouded with the suspense of a moment, was the little face when it first appeared; then the blue eyes grew bigger and searched with a slight shade of fear in them; then the corners of her mouth began to droop. "Perhaps he is in the library," said Vera slowly. "It is not possible that he can have forgotten?" and then the little mouth quivered, and a shower of quick tears came down in a moment. "But no, no; Aunt Elinor is there, and he does not like her, and she has frightened him away."

"I am much obliged to you, Vera," said Miss Meadows laughing; "but on the contrary, my dear, your father likes me very well, and it is he who has sent me—"

"To take us to meet him," cried the child with a sudden recovery of sunshine, despising all probabilities; upon which a gruff voice arose behind her, and Eddy said curtly, himself unseen: "He never intended it. I told you so. Vera, come along and don't cry."

"Your papa is very busy; he was obliged to go out early. I will remind him when he comes home," said Mrs. Tremeneere. Vera rushed into the room and pulled off her best hat violently, pulling off along with it the pretty ribbon that tied her hair. She clenched her fists like a little fury, looking out through a mist of shiny looks with tears and rage in her eyes, and stamped her little foot on the carpet. "Eddy said so," she cried, "but I could not believe him. I would not believe him. Oh, isn't it dreadful; isn't it shameful! To break his word! You would kill me for it if it was me."

"Vera, you forget yourself," said her mother. "But I don't forget my promises!" cried the child, "and why should big people be let do things which children mustn't! No, I shan't come, Eddy. I'll stay here. I don't want to go out. I don't care for anything. I have had a disappointment;" and Vera marched to a corner of the room and sat down, gloomily turning her face to the wall.

The two women looked on with more interest than the situation warranted. Vera ought to have been whipped, I allow; but the circumstances gave a certain changed character to her childish petulance. Elinor Meadows went up to her friend and stood over her chair, stooping to whisper that the child might not hear. "If you carry out your intentions," she said, feeling herself to be delivering a stroke against which no woman could have any defence, "what is to be done about them? Are they to be divided and separated like your other goods? Ada, Ada, you can never have thought of that."

"I have thought of little else," said Mrs. Tremeneere, with a twitching about her lips. "Of course it is the chief thing to think of. It has been my thought night and day. In the ordinary way of arranging such matters Vera would go with me, and I Eddy with his father; but—"

"But—?" "If you only know how long and how much I have thought of it! Yes—if I had Vera I should bring her up to be like myself—and I am not such a great success as I might have been, Nelly; while his father would chill Eddy into a nobody and leave him to grow up as he pleased, or as his schoolmaster pleased. But Mr. Tremeneere is proud of the child." Here Mrs. Tremeneere's voice grew choked, and for the moment she broke down.

"Ada," cried her friend, "for heaven's sake don't be obstinate. Why should you bring all this pain upon yourself?"

"I do it for the best," said Mrs. Tremeneere, faintly; then she recovered her tone of authority. "There is, I believe a principle in human nature which makes men kinder to women (in the abstract) and women kinder to men than either are to their own sex—at least, such is the general opinion. Bringing up Vera would be to me a matter of course; one knows all about it—it is a thing of routine; as we were trained ourselves—or exactly the reverse—we train our daughters; but a boy—that requires thought. Therefore, Nelly, it is my opinion that I could do most justice to Eddy."

"And Vera?" said Miss Meadows, "she whom you call the child? I know she is the apple of your eye, however you may choose to deny it; is Mr. Tremeneere, do you think, likely to do the most justice to her?"

Vera's mother bore her friend's satirical gaze for a moment, then she put up her hands and covered her face. Vera, who was sitting somewhat sullen on a stool in the corner after her outburst, her pretty hair dishevelled and her pretty face stained with crying, had begun to wake up from the monotony of a fit of ill-temper which had lasted two whole minutes, and as her eyes began to wander round the room in search of some excitement, she suddenly perceived this group, which surprised her. Elinor Meadows, with her finger elevated in the air, scolding—as Vera thought—and mamma crying! Such an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances had never happened to her knowledge before. She started up from her seat, and threw herself between them.

"Aunt Elinor!" cried Vera, thrusting her small person in front of her mother. "You can tell me what it is if you want to scold—but you shan't make mamma cry."

Upon this Elinor, strong-minded woman as she was, began to whimper too.

"Child, you are a darling!" she cried, making a sudden attempt to kiss her; which Vera repulsed, standing up like a little lioness at her mother's knee.

Then Mrs. Tremeneere raised her head, and putting an arm round her little defender, drew Vera to her side. Vera deserved that whipping all the same, I do not deny, and her mother knew it; but it was not in human courage to administer it now. She took the little impatient hand which had been raised in her defence, and held it between her own and kissed it. Though she had so much self-command it took her some time to clear her voice.

"Mr. Tremeneere is a good man," she said, still faltering. "He will do as I mean to do myself. He will feel that it is a new thing, and that he does not understand it, and he will study what is best."

"But for a girl! A man, without any experience or understanding, left in charge of a girl?"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Tremeneere.

Vera turned round from one to the other, her eyes widening once more with curiosity and eagerness. "Something is going to happen," she said. "Mamma, tell me what it is?"

"I cannot tell you yet, dear, for I don't know. Go, Vera, Eddy is calling you.—Who has taught her that something is going to happen?" she said, with a sigh, when they had watched

the child's unwilling departure. She herself looked so melan- choly and depressed that Elinor saw her opportunity. She was of an oratorical turn, and, indeed had given some attention to the art of public speaking. She withdrew a step for the greater effect, and shaking her curly grey locks off her broad fair forehead, began:

"Ada! What kind of a woman are you, flesh and blood or rock and stone, to look at that child and leave her, and make up your mind in cold blood to give her up! I say nothing about your boy. He won't talk to me, I don't understand him. Mothers have weaknesses for their boys which are inexplicable; the most uninteresting, speechless, stolid beings! (I don't mean Eddy) and yet women will stand by them—for no reason but an accident of birth—while a child like that!—If she was mine, they should cut me in little pieces before I parted with her. They should take everything else I possess. Ada! I tell you, if she was mine I should not care for all the men in the world. I should take her whatever they did—steal her if it was necessary, run away, hide myself; but part with her!—never—not for the world!"

"I see what you mean," said Mrs. Tremeneere, with a trembling voice; "don't take the devil's part and tempt me. I must be just. There are two of us and two of them, father and mother, boy and girl. He has a right to his share as well as I. We must be just. If it is barbarous to give all to the father, it would be equally barbarous to give all to the mother. Nelly, say no more! That would be a crime."

"Then I should risk the crime," cried Elinor. "I should care nothing for justice in comparison with Vera. Bah! abstract justice! who minds it? It is a thing to frighten babies with. Do you think Mr. Tremeneere would mind about justice, if he could get the better of you?"

"You are talking of my husband," said Mrs. Tremeneere, with dignity, "besides, if he were to do wrong a hundred times (which he would not) that would be no excuse for me. I will do him no injustice whatever happens."

"Then put up with him, Ada! It is your only alternative. Good heavens, what does it matter? An argument more or less, a discussion here or there. You have always been fond of argument. Make it up! For my part I'd almost marry him myself," cried Elinor, in a burst of energy, "to have that child—and you have married him, and got all the worst over. Make it up, Ada; don't be foolish—make up!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BREACH ACCOMPISHED

BEFORE Christmas it was all over. Christmas! Perhaps we make a good deal of unnecessary fuss about this festival—not that the associations about it, the traditions of universal kindness and goodwill which, fortunately for us, are so English, and still more fortunately are more or less so honestly carried out, can ever be exaggerated. Yet it is no doubt true that the universal jollity, the rude fun and sometimes mawkish sentiment which have got to be associated with the name, just as often disgust and sadden as delight those who have learned by time or trouble that Christmas does not always bring the reunion and happiness which are supposed to be its particular privilege. Alas! on the contrary, how sharply it reminds some of us of gaps not to be filled again, of empty places, of life diminished and wearing out! But whether we do rightly or not in making a saturnalia of its homely delights, certain it is that of all times to choose for a parting, Christmas is the least appropriate. I don't think Mrs. Tremeneere thought of this; she had so many things to think about, how should she remember dates? It was the morning of the 24th of December, but she had forgotten, so full was her mind of other things, that the 24th of December was Christmas Eve. She went away in the afternoon in a cab to the railway station, with Eddy by her side, dull and lowering and miserable, not knowing why he was so unhappy. No explanations had been entered into with the children. Mrs. Tremeneere was in reality so miserable that she desired to avoid dramatic effect as far as this was possible, and her husband naturally as a man and an Englishman hated scenes. So the curious boy and girl, full of secret interest in the something going on which was not confided to them were put off with the intimation that Mamma was going away for a time taking Eddy with her, while Vera was to stay at home to "take care of papa." Eddy for one was never taken in by this false explanation, but Vera in the delight of her own importance contrived to stave off her vague inquietude on the subject, and accepted it. The boy's inquietude was equally vague, but it was stronger. He felt himself a very forlorn wail and stray as the dreary cab traversed the streets, where all the shops were decked for Christmas, and where so many holiday parties were wandering about looking in at the shop windows for their Christmas presents. "Mamma," he said at last, when his heart was too full to bear the pressure longer, "isn't it very odd to leave home to-day when to-morrow is Christmas?" A big tear was forming in the corner of his eye. He did not like to look up at her, lest she should see it, or lest—still more terrible possibility—it should fall.

Mrs. Tremeneere put her arm round him. I will not say that she was in much better plight than Eddy was, though a strong sense of duty held her up. Something was choking in her throat which was not exactly the fog, and her heart was wrung with a sterner pang. She paused a moment to be quite firm and collected, and drew him close to her. "Yes," she said, "it is very odd, very odd; but I can't help it, Eddy." There was a kind of apology, a kind of appeal in her voice, and it went to Eddy's heart, who vaguely comprehended, though it would have been utterly impossible for him to put in words what it was felt and understood. He crouched himself up close against his mother, and caressed the hand that was round him, and allowed those two tears with which his eyes were big to drop upon it; and thus the pain in both was a little softened and sweetened, though the child was as far from understanding intellectually what the woman had in her mind as if they had been creatures of different species. But to go away to a hotel in Brighton through the cold, through the wintry dimness and brightness, through the crowds of travellers that cumbered every railway, the clusters of happy holiday people, and all the hamper and all the presents—one must have done it to know what it is. Mrs. Tremeneere bought some Christmas numbers of various periodicals at the station to amuse the boy. They were all about meetings, dances, mistletoe, wanderers returning and hard hearts relenting, and every kind of revolution made in every kind of life by the simple agency of Christmas cars, snow, church bells, and sentiment. "Merry Christmas," the shop boys shouted at them in big print. "Merry Christmas," the porter said when he got his slixence. And so misty distance which led to Brighton if you please, but which was the cold outside world,—outside of home.

Elinor Meadows joined them next day in the strange hotel looking out upon the quay, which Mrs. Tremeneere had chosen as the first step in her self-hanishment. It was not that Miss Meadows had not many cheerful houses to which to go for Christmas, but being a kind-hearted soul, as well as a strong-minded woman, she preferred to come to Brighton, and spend the festival in the dimmest way over the fire in a sitting-room of a big vulgar inn, with her depressed and somewhat irritable friend. Never was a work more worthy of a good Samaritan. She came in the middle of the day, after church, which was the only cheerful portion of the Christmas to poor Eddy. The holly-berries and the wreaths pleased the child, and the Christmas hymns which he could sing, and which did him good, till they came out of church into the dreary world again. To be sure, Eddy wanted a hundred times during the service to nudge Vera, and call her attention to a bit of decoration that pleased him, or to the little girl in the next pew who fell asleep, or to the clergyman curtsying to the altar in his long cassock and surplice, or some one of the other anything, nothing that caught his childish eyes; but still church is church wherever you are, and not so terribly dull as a strange place far from home. And then it was a hopeless sort of Christmas Day, with neither sunshine nor frost, such as are orthodox and besetting, but a drizzling rain, and skies so low, so leaden, and so cloudy that they seemed to Eddy to be coming down upon him, threatening to crush him every minute. After Elinor came (whom the children called Aunt Elinor for friendship's sake, though there was no relationship between them) it grew duller and duller for Eddy. He had not anything to do with the conversation of his mother and her friend, which was carried on in subdued tones, and with occasional warning glances from one to the other at himself which showed him that he was in the way—upon which, being proud, Eddy gathered together the Christmas papers his mother had bought him, and drew a chair to the window, in front of which he placed himself, shutting out half of the grey and stifled daylight there was, and pored over first one and then another of his stories, wondering to himself rather why all those tales were of people who came back, and not one of people who went away just at Christmas. He read and read, hearing behind him the murmur of the two voices, the sound of the sparkling, crackling fire, and seeing, when by chance he lifted his eyes, the grey sea breaking in a maddly soiled rim of white upon the grey pebbles, and the street, which looked like a very dismal Sunday street—"only rather more so," Eddy thought. But he did not often raise his eyes. He read on and on, one tale after another, scarcely quite sure where one ended and another began, till the monotony of his reading and of the happing waves outside, and the murmuring voices within, lulled the lonely boy into a kind of dream.

The ladies had drawn their chairs to the fire; they had eaten their luncheon, they had done their best to be cheerful; and now the floods of remark and criticism and question which were in Elinor's mind could be contained no longer. She began even before poor Eddy withdrew, leaving them at liberty; and showed her sympathy, as so many friends do, by taunt and sudden reproach.

"Well," she said, "you have done it now. It is all over, and every place of repentance comfortably cut off. How do you like it? You have given up your husband to confusion and remorse. You have left your child—"

"Mr. Tremeneere has nothing to be remorseful about," said his wife, with a slight shiver, turning away from the last suggestion. "You mistake the matter altogether, Elinor. You do not understand either me or him. I blame him for nothing. He has no need to be remorseful on my account."

"Then why, in the name of heaven, did you go away? I never believed you would carry it out. I expected you to threaten and frighten him, and then to relent."

"That is to say," cried Mrs. Tremeneere, "that you expected me to do exactly what the woman does whom you find fault with in books, and are indignant about as a man's idea of women. You expect me to say things I don't mean, and do the reverse of what I say, and act like a creature without conscience, or honour, or moral responsibility."

"Ada! No, I don't do anything of the sort. Don't please come down upon an unoffending person in this way. I don't quite see why, in a case where the feelings are concerned, you should not act as a great many other people act, who are not without honour or conscience."

"I may be wrong," said Mrs. Tremeneere. "No one is free from the risk of taking a wrong view. But to threaten anything without meaning to do it is not possible to me. This seemed to me right—"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Elinor. "We need not discuss it over again. Isn't there a book which is called 'He Knew He Was Right'? We must put it the other way now. You are right and you are satisfied. And now what are you going to do? You can't stay always here."

"No, I am going—to devote myself to *his* education."

She would not say Eddy's name to attract his attention. Was he not happily unconscious, absorbed in his Christmas stories? so, at least, she thought.

"That too is abstract, Ada. Don't tell me where you mean to go unless you like—but give me some idea of your plans."

"I have not any yet. I must find out what is best."

"Put him to school, Ada. That is always best for boys. Put him to some good school, and then when you are free of responsibility, come abroad with me. I have been thinking of it all the morning. You want change, you want refreshment. You have been worried and tired. Get the boy comfortably disposed of, so that you need have no anxiety about him, and come with me."

"Get him comfortably disposed of where I shall have no anxiety about him!" Mrs. Tremeneere repeated slowly with a smile.

"Yes," said Elinor, suspecting no sarcasm in her tone, "it would be the very thing to do. That is the chief good of children at his age; you can dispose of them in so satisfactory a way. Vera under the care of her father, Eddy at school; and then you and I—"

"Can go and enjoy ourselves?" said Mrs. Tremeneere with a forced laugh.

"Why not? Of course we should enjoy ourselves. Don't you recollect before you were married that trip we took? I was not much more than a girl, and how I did enjoy it! I never thought there would be such luck for me again. Come, Ada, now you are free, with only the boy to dispose of, this is the very thing to do. We might start almost at once; stay at Nice or Cannes, to rest ourselves a little, and then on to Rome."

Mrs. Tremeneere rose before Elinor had got this length, and began to walk about the room in an agitated way. Then she went across to where Eddy, in front of the window, had dropped half asleep over the stories, with the monotony and the misery and the stillness. She woke him up bending over him,

However, after these very different scenes, both husband and wife set themselves to think on the subject, as Mrs. Triemmenheere

had predicted. "He shall not say that the boy is ruined by a woman's training," she said to herself; and "She shall not taunt me that I have not been able to look after the girl," said Mr. Tremeneere. This delightful spirit of opposition worked strongly in concert with other feelings more laudable, for indeed both parents were fond of their children in their different ways. Mrs. Tremeneere's part was the easiest of the two, and she took her steps promptly. The very next day after that revelation had been made to her, she went off to one of the great public schools and put Eddy's name down, and began herself to look for a house in the neighbourhood, for she did not mean to throw the boy off entirely, as her childless friend thought right and expedient. Before Easter, at which time Eddy began his school life, she had found the house she wanted, a villa on a hillside, which was not high indeed, but which had all the advantages of much greater height, since it looked over a great plain of rich cultivated country, fields, and hedges, and fine trees, and red farmhouses, with here and there a great mansion gleaming away into the far distance, till it got indistinct like the sea, and almost as suggestive. Here she settled and furnished her house, which was agreeable work, and tossed the pale boy into the sea of life and youth close by—where he soon ceased to be pale.

Mr. Tremeneere, poor man, had a more difficult task. The first thing he did was to reflect bitterly upon his wife's abandonment of her natural duty. "It is just like a woman," he said to himself through his teeth. "They profess to love their children beyond everything, and yet they will give up their children rather than give in or own themselves wrong." But this reflection, though it was in its way satisfactory, did not help him to the solution of his problem. How was he to bring up his daughter? In his perplexity he betook himself wisely to a friend who was a clergyman, and had to do with all kind of educational and benevolent institutions. "I suppose I want a governess," he said. "She must be old to avoid scandal, and well educated and so forth, but chiefly she must be a dragon—recollect this. She must never relax night nor day. I will have my girl well looked after; that is one thing I am determined on. A woman who will suspect everything, believe nothing, and keep an eye upon her for ever."

"Surely this is going too far. It is against the spirit of the time. Everything tends to emancipate women, Tremeneere, not to make slaves of them."

"I hate the spirit of the time," he said. "I hate your enlightened women that know the world as well as we do. I want my girl to be of the old type. I want her to be seen and not heard, like our grandmothers. And therefore I want a dragon for her governess—a woman that will allow nothing out of the regulation in point of propriety—an iceberg, a machine, whatever you please, but one that will guard the child, and watch her and make her incapable of mischief. Now, if you have any regard for me, bestir yourself and find out what I want."

"I have her," said the clergyman, sighing. "So few people want dragons nowadays that I feared she would have to fall back upon the Home, poor lady. But as that is what you want—only I don't think you'll find it successful with a high-spirited child like Vera."

"Vera's high spirits must come down," said her father. "I want a soft, submissive, yielding girl, and not a self-opinionated being that will set up for a mind of her own. What do they want with minds of their own?"

"Tremeneere, you speak like a Turk." "Perhaps I feel like one," he said, dismissing the subject with a forced laugh. And this was how he found his way out of the dilemma. Miss Campbell arrived at the end of the week, a tall, severe Scotswoman, with a large nose and high cheekbones. She was over fifty, and she had been trained in the belief that young ladies ought to be kept in absolute subjection. A girl who had no will but that of her parents, and who consulted her mother with her eyes before she took a piece of bread and butter, was Miss Campbell's ideal; she was exactly the kind of person to satisfy Mr. Tremeneere.

Thus father and mother entered at the same time into the right way, or into what they thought to be the right way; and the two experiments of education began.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE ELEVEN

A BRIGHT July day, early in the month, with London still full, and all the world weary yet toiling on, more or less, in the treadmill work of society; such a day as revives the toilers in that everlasting round, and breathes into hundreds of worn-out minds an air of freshness, waking them up from the fatigue of their pleasures and of their disgust. Stands all round, with ladies ranged one row above another like banks of flowers, carriages thronging twenty deep, and crowds standing in a deep inner ring. But it is not a race-course, like Ascot or Epsom. It is in the heart of London; and all these thousands of fine people surround a green smooth lawn on which a set of lads are playing—no such great matter, one would suppose, and little comprehensible to a foreigner. Yet surely this is one of the most innocent, the kindest of all freaks of fashion. The fine ladies are turned as by magic into mothers and sisters. They have their parasols and their dresses and their horses' heads trimmed with symbolical ribbons. Many of the younger ones watch the game with an anxiety as great as if the welfare of the kingdom depended upon it; and the men, worldworn men from all sorts of unlikely places, men from the clubs and the public offices, and Parliament, and business, carry their ensigns too, if not so openly, in some snip of blue somewhere about them, a forget-me-not in a button-hole, a tassel to an umbrella. And this is all, need I say, for Eton against Harrow, the Public Schools Match. Not to a hundredth part of these crowds is it given to have a personal interest in the sublime band on either side. But as every smallest imp, with his knot of blue ribbon, feels himself Eton or Harrow impersonated against all the world, so all the elder people stand by the school to which they are vaguely attached in the person of that smallest of schoolboys with as much fervour as if they belonged to the Captain of the Eleven. But those who do belong to the Captain of the Eleven—those who can with exultant yet anxious eyes follow the apparition of that demigod as he comes and goes—who can describe the feelings that agitate their bosoms? Such feelings had full sway on the special occasion to which we refer, in a certain modest carriage, holding two ladies, which occupied one of the places in the front rank at Lord's, carefully placed there before daylight to make sure of a good view. The elder lady in it took but little interest in what was going on, but then, though the elder, she was the least important and her young companion was entirely absorbed in the scene. She was but sixteen, dressed in the simplest demure costume of white, and sometimes whiter still than her

dress with agitation, sometimes all flushed and rose-red with excitement. Her eyes, her whole soul, her whole heart were fixed on the game and the players. Her young bosom gave a great throb whenever there was a good hit on her own side. Her heart sank when the good hit was on the other. She had neither sight, nor hearing, nor understanding for anything else. And who will wonder? She was the sister of the Captain of the Eleven. It is unnecessary to say which of the blues that captain wore. Tremeneere had played once before for his school, but as this was almost by an accident, and not known until the last moment, "his people" did not have the glory of it as they ought; but with full announcement and preparation the once backward Eddy, the boy whom his mother had spoilt, burst suddenly upon the world now. And everything else was dwarfed to Vera by this event. All other honours and delights grew dim before it. She watched her brother (whom she scarcely knew) with a strange enthusiasm, and eagerness, and anxiety which it is impossible to describe. How could she bear to see him beaten? If life and death had been on it she could not have taken it more seriously. Her hand was on the door of the carriage, sometimes trembling, sometimes holding it tight with agony when the other side seemed to be making progress; the pretty girlish figure bent a little forward, her eyes intent, never losing a movement, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, unaware who came near her, who passed, even who spoke to her,—and all this for a cricket match! But then it was much more than a cricket match for Vera. Her brother seemed to her the very foremost young man in England. Had not he and his comrades eclipsed all other incidents in busy London on this hot day? Parliament itself was diminished. There was nobody in the Row, afternoon teas were as good as done away with; telegrams from hour to hour appeared in all the papers, the streets were full of the two different blues. What wonder that Vera, only sixteen, should think her brother the very greatest personage that ever girl belonged to? She looked at the card in her hand now and then when Edward was not not playing to read his name with a thrill of fresh excitement. "Tremeneere, captain." If he had come to this honour and glory when he was only eighteen, what prizes must not life hold for such a hero?

"Vera, my dear, I think you should put down your veil? People are remarking you. I don't think it is nice to be so absorbed in anything. You forget yourself altogether, my dear."

"Why should I remember myself?—there is nothing in me to remember," she said, in her excitement. Then coming to herself, "Oh please, Miss Campbell, I do so hate a veil. It gets in one's eyes, and one can't see."

"Dear, how often must I tell you that a well-bred girl expresses herself much more quietly. Take the opera-glass, then, that conceals the face."

"But I can see very well without it. I can see Eddy quite plain. Look, Miss Campbell! I can always make him out. There! four for us."

"I don't understand the interest you all take in this game," said Miss Campbell. "In Scotland the gentlemen play golf, which they tell me is much finer exercise. All this I think is very bad for the boys. All London coming out to look at them hitting a ball with a stick. And bad for you too, Vera. If you get so very much excited I think I must take you away."

Vera knew that this could not be done, and therefore heard the threat calmly. Fortunately, after a while, Miss Campbell got engrossed with something else, and with a sigh of relief she let the glass drop, thus revealing her moving animated countenance all at once to two people to whom the sight of it was like something from heaven. The one was a middle-aged woman, no more or less than Vera's mother; the other, a young man. Let us keep the more interesting personage to the last. Mrs. Tremeneere has the best right to come forward. She stood at a little distance among the crowd looking at her child. She had always called Vera by this name. After years of virtual separation—though there never had been any personal objection made on either side to either parent seeing the children when he or she pleased—here was the child she had left grown into a woman. I cannot describe the feelings with which her mother regarded her, gazing at the young absorbed countenance. Little Vera, the baby, the plaything, the amusement of the house, the little bud of life whom she had left behind, not knowing what was to come of her!

"Look, Elinor!" she said, grasping the arm of her inseparable companion, and leaning on her with a trembling which she could not command.

"I see her," said Miss Meadows, cheerfully. "Hasn't she grown up pretty? Come and speak to her, Ada. She must be looking for you."

"She is looking for her brother, nothing else," said Mrs. Tremeneere. "Wait a little, Nelly; I feel like a divorced woman, with no right to go near my child. God help us! what those wretched beings must suffer! I never thought of it before."

"One never does think of other people's sufferings till one shares them," said Elinor, oracularly. "Thank heaven, you are not so bad as that. Come along. Shall I go first and tell her?"

"Wait a little."

Mrs. Tremeneere, though she was a strong-minded woman, trembled for the meeting. What would the child think of the mother who had deserted her? If she had been only a child! but a woman with a mind and judgment—who could understand and perhaps condemn. She stood by and looked at this creature of sixteen with her heart in a flutter. The judgment of a child is a terrible tribunal. One can face the world and one's equals, knowing all that is in one's favour, and feeling the full force of one's rights. But the secret verdict of a boy or girl, whom natural respect will prevent from expressing it or even defining it to themselves—what a thing that is to encounter! Very seldom do fathers or mothers encounter this judgment in so dramatically distinct a manner as Mrs. Tremeneere had to do; and she trembled and held back. What if she should read dislike, disapproval, the pained and wondering sentence of the innocent in Vera's eyes?

In the meantime the other individual of whom I have spoken had gone past again, gazing furiously at the carriage. "Jove! how pretty she is," he was saying to himself. "How absorbed she is, not seeing me nor any one! That's what I like in a girl; never to see you if you stare like a madman. Why should she? The ones that are thinking of themselves see you fast enough. She is not thinking of herself, bless her. I wonder who she's thinking of? One of those fellows in their flannels. Idiots! with nothing but hits to leg and catches got or missed in their empty heads. I beg your pardon, Miss Meadows, I am very sorry. I hope I did not hurt a ribbon or a feather."

"You are very saucy to talk of feathers and ribbons. You have hurt me. Where are you going with your head over your shoulder? Who are you gazing at?"

"Look here," cried the young man, drawing her aside. "Look at that girl's face. What is she, a Cecilia or a rapt young Madonna intent upon the angel? No, perhaps she is not exactly beautiful. I don't care for your beautiful faces, all feature and nothing else."

"Oswald! when you do nothing but rave about form. Greek, forsooth! As if good English flesh and blood was not finer than your marbles!"

"Miss Meadows, you were always a woman of the most just ideas. Precisely what I think. Look at her! the features are not much, but the expression is divine. I should like to paint her, I should like to carry her off. I should like to—"

"Not at her I hope, though your eyes look like it—for, hush! here is her mother," cried Elinor. Mr. Oswald face started, and grew red, and drew back a step. He turned to the other face behind him in which he was not so interested; and yet that, too, if painting had been all that he was thinking of! Mrs. Tremeneere had not heard what was going on between the others. She too, was absorbed, thinking only of one thing,—how Vera would look at her, what she should see in the child's eyes. The young man gave a glance at her, then turned back to the first object of his admiration.

"Is it only that they resemble each other," he whispered, "or what gives them both that rapt look? It is interesting—Do you know them?—I should like to be you. I wonder if that girl is like her face."

"If you are patient and wait, perhaps I may introduce you," said Elinor. "I don't know that she is like her face. That is one side of her. Wait—I must introduce her mother to her first."

"Introduce—her mother!"

"Hush! It's a story. I'll tell it you afterwards.—Ada, come! you are wasting all the morning, and I tell you she expects you. That is what she is looking for."

"She is looking for her brother," said Mrs. Tremeneere, "and it is quite right, I don't complain. Stand by me, Nelly. I feel very silly, as if I might make a scene."

"Don't make a scene whatever you do!" cried Elinor.

"Nonsense, there is nothing so dreadful about it. Come." Vera's attention was aroused a moment after by the shock of finding a hand laid upon hers. She looked up quickly with a start, and saw the mother of whom she had seen so little, and whom at the first moment she scarcely recognised, standing beside her. The girl's heart gave a violent jump—sudden tears came into her eyes and a choking in her throat.

"Mamma?" she said, interrogatively. The shock brought all the blood to her heart. She looked wistfully, anxiously at this sudden claimant. Miss Campbell sat looking on, somewhat uneasy. She had never believed in the pretence about Mrs. Tremeneere's separation from her husband. Incompatibility! It was no use telling a woman of her experience this. She looked at the stranger with a mixture of disapproval and dislike, and bent forward across the carriage, as if to ask what she wanted, pretending she did not know.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tremeneere, taking her daughter's hand between her own, and holding it closely, "I have been looking for you, Vera."

What was in Vera's face? Her eyes were not so limpid, so frankly and tenderly eager as when she gazed at her brother; a shadow was over the young countenance—but what? Mrs. Tremeneere could not tell what it was that clouded her eyes.

"Oh, mamma! you will get into the carriage, won't you?" she said, trying to open the door.

"I will stand here and talk to you a little. Stoop down and give me a kiss, Vera, my darling," cried the poor woman.

Vera put down her soft, youthful face, upon which the same doubtful, wondering, troubled expression still hung. She did not know what to think. Her brother—yes, that was right, that was nature. But her mother? Could she sit here and let her stand by her. Should not she get out and follow her, and cease to be a stranger to her; or should she be cold and keep back and take papa's part? Vera did not know what to do. The triumphant satisfaction died out of her face. Eddy was the sunshine of this picture, but her mother was the inevitable shadow. She put her soft face down to meet Mrs. Tremeneere's kiss, but raised it again tingling with blushes, as if it had been a stranger who had kissed her. She could not look at her brother again, with this figure at her elbow. Ought she not to give her entire attention to the new-comer? So many emotions chased each other over her face that the young man in the crowd who was still looking at her gazed in his pockets instinctively for a pencil, and then laughed at himself. "Draw all that—a whole volume in two lines!" he said to himself. "What a fool I am."

"Vera, you have grown almost a woman—"

"Yes, mamma." She made a little pause, panting in her agitation and bewilderment, which poor Mrs. Tremeneere feared was reluctance to give her that title. This went to her heart, but she would not show it. She began bravely again.

"And Eddy is almost a man. You are like each other; he has grown stronger and taller than I expected. You are pleased to see him, Vera? and of course you have got his colours. Poor boy, I suppose he is very happy with all these people staring at him; and that pleases you too?"

"Pleases me! oh more than that. I am so proud I don't know what to say, no word is strong enough. Are not you proud and happy, too, mamma?"

"I proud and happy? I don't know, my darling, I do not use such words. I am pleased that you are all pleased—"

"Oh, mamma! What could you wish, what could you have more?" said Vera, indignant with fire in her eyes.

"Vera, I beg you will not be so vehement. It is quite out of place," said Miss Campbell with dignity, "in a well bred girl."

The blood rushed to Mrs. Tremeneere's face. She felt herself stung to the very heart. Of all that had happened to her this reproof, addressed by another woman to her child in her presence, was, I think, the very hardest blow she had yet had to bear. She made a strenuous effort to command herself. "I must beg pardon," she said, "for forgetting Miss Campbell in the agitation of seeing Vera for the first time after a long separation; and I owe you many, many thanks for your good offices to my child." She held out her hand across Vera. Miss Campbell touched the tips of her fingers with reluctance. All very well to talk of incompatibility! She, an experienced woman, felt sure that there was more in it than that, and she did not like to touch the erring woman, even with her finger tips.

"I wish Vera would profit more by my lessons; but it is a thankless task," she said.

"Mamma," said Vera, "it is impossible that I can sit here and see you standing there; either you must come into the carriage or I must get down; this sort of thing cannot be!"

At this moment, however, another personage came suddenly (Continued on page 16.)

(Continued from page 12.)
on the scene, whose appearance stilled Vera and had the strangest effect upon her mother.—Mr. Tremerehere, with Edward's colours in his buttonhole, and a glow of pleasure on his face which smoothed away all harshness from it. He came up to his wife with outstretched hands. "How do you do, Ada? I am very glad to see you looking so well," he said heartily, "though here you are, triumphing over me with your boy."

"Triumphing over you? I had no such meaning." It seemed impossible not to contradict him, do what she would. She saw this, and her voice sank a little. Then she said with a smile: "He is your boy as well as mine."

"I am taking all the credit of him, I assure you," he said. "I never thought Eddy would have turned out so well. He does you credit. The most prominent young person in England for the moment; to be sure it won't last long, but still it is always something. Look at Vera, as proud as a little peacock!"

"What an idiot the man is!" whispered Oswald Fane, behind backs, to Elinor Meadows; for they were all within hearing, and quite innocently so in consequence of the crowd, "he means like a little white dove."

"Not such a dove either," said Elinor. "Vera has a spirit—but she has a dragon by her side, and is kept down dreadfully, poor little darling."

"I wish mine might be the hand to free her."
"What do you say? Oswald, she is too young to flirt.—Promise me you will attempt no flirtation if I introduce you. She is only a child, and you are, as you know, not so—"

"Angelic as I ought to be," he answered, laughing. "No, I promise you, on my honour, there shall be no flirtation properly so-called. But stop—if I can make her like me? I won't deceive you—"

"Then I shan't introduce you at all," said Elinor, putting back from her forehead those gray curls, like a child's, which the wind kept ruffling out.

"I want mamma to come into the carriage, please," said Vera.

"Of course, she must," Mr. Tremerehere cried, opening the door, "and you are coming home with us, the boy and you? Nobody can have so good a claim upon you. Where are you staying—with Elinor Meadows? well, she shall come too; and you will tell me, Ada, if you approve of my work as much as I approve of yours. Come, Vera will be unhappy otherwise—and so shall I."

Mrs. Tremerehere kept asking herself all this time whether the nerves of a woman like herself, always strong and steady, as she liked to think them, were to be less under command than the nerves of a man. If he took it as a matter of course, must not she do the same? But it cost her an effort—for sentiment, perhaps, in all circumstances has more power, whether she will own it or not, over a woman than over a man. She answered, however, cheerfully, after that struggle.

"To be sure—it is the natural arrangement. Eddy will be very glad to spend an evening with his sister—and I—"

Nobody heard the end of the sentence. Her husband had given her his hand to help her into the carriage; where she sat down by the side of prim Miss Campbell, who did not budge, and who kept thinking to herself with *naïve* disregard of grammar—"Me to be sitting by the side of a woman compromised!" And there Mrs. Tremerehere sat for the first half hour in a sort of dream, Vera opposite to her, all apparently as it might have been had she never deserted her home; apparently—yet without any reality in the appearance. By and bye old friends began to find her out, and one brought another to greet and congratulate her.

"All made up, I suppose?" these visitors whispered to Elinor Meadows as they passed. "Absurd business altogether!" But no one was prim except Miss Campbell, who scarcely condescended to notice the mother of her charge. As for Mr. Tremerehere, he went about among the crowd radiant. "Tremerehere must be a relative of yours," his friends said to him. "Yes!—only my son," he said, his countenance expanding, Eddy might have attained a much more substantial success without pleasing him half so much. Pride very often puts on the guise of love, so that one cannot tell them apart. Mr. Tremerehere had thought but little of Eddy hitherto; he took all the credit, as he said, and really felt that he had everything to do with the boy. A boy who had put himself in the front so easily, and was for the moment the observed of all observers, the very centre to which was directed the gaze of society, was indisputably a son of whom every parent was entitled to be proud.

CHAPTER VII.

A DINNER AT HYDE PARK SQUARE

I DO NOT know by what charm Miss Meadows had been gained over to tell a fib, and enact a whole little drama of domestic perfidy; but she did it. When Mr. Tremerehere in his satisfaction asked her to dinner she told him unblushingly that she had just invited young Oswald Fane, a connection of Lord Fanebury's, a very clever young man, in whom she took a great interest, to dine with her, and did not see how she could put him off. "Clever young men were always Elinor's weakness," said Mr. Tremerehere, so intoxicated with his own contentment that he forgot for the moment that it was not his habit to call Miss Meadows by her Christian name. "But if he is one of the Fanes of Fanebury I know his uncle. Bring him with you. That will make it all right."

And thus accidentally Oswald Fane was introduced into Hyde Park Square. He was not so near a relation of Lord Fanebury's as Mr. Tremerehere in his moment of elation was ready to suppose. As he waited till his son had changed his dress, and walked out with him to the crowded streets, feeling sure that everybody he met knew that the blushing youth was the hero of the day, that proud father was ready to receive as a heir presumptive at the least, anybody who might have been presented to him. His gratified pride threw a radiance over all the world. He was for the time being the most proud of fathers, the most kind of men. He put his arm through Eddy's, who was two inches taller than himself, with that delightful mixture of the familiar friend with the father which everybody says it is so pleasant to see, and introduced him to several men they met, with overflowing satisfaction. Then when they got out of the lingering crowd, away into the more quiet streets, Mr. Tremerehere began to inquire into his son's hopes and intentions for the future, as a father should.

"Is this your last year at school," he said. "How old are you? Eighteen! Are you expected to stay another year?"

"I think, sir," said Edward, "that my mother means me to leave and go to Oxford at once. But—I don't think anything is settled. If you thought—"

"I have left all that to your mother," said Mr. Tremerehere. "That was a bargain, and I don't mean to interfere with her. Your mother is a very sensible woman. We did not get on when

we were together, which was unfortunate, but she has managed admirably with you, and I approve all she does. And after Oxford, Ned, what then, my boy? What do you think of doing then?"

"Well, sir," said Eddy, "that is a thing there has been no decision about—I think my mother—"

"Yes, but in the choice of a profession one must act for one's self. What do you think? You will have your mother's money, of course, but it will scarcely be enough to enable you to take the position I should like to see you take. You must do something—"

"My mother's money is her own," said Edward, with a slight flush upon his face. "I don't want her to give it me. I am very willing to do something. Indeed I am not at all sure about Oxford for my part, except that she wishes it. For you ought to know, sir," he added, looking down with another flush of colour, "I am not clever; good enough as a bat and that sort of thing, but not much good in school."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Tremerehere. But he said it without anything of that half shame, half pity, both sentiments generally concealed by a caress, with which the women among whom Edward Tremerehere had been brought up regarded his though success in school. The boy had learned to divine of his father nobody ever put it into words, and the easy tone of his father cheered and eased him in the most wonderful way. Was it then perhaps not so humiliating after all to be without Greek? Might a fellow still do something though he could not get Greek and Latin into his head, and had no hope of a scholarship? Edward felt cheered and encouraged he could scarcely tell why. "Yes, I am afraid it is so. I have got such a bad memory or something. I do my work, but it goes out of my head again just as fast. That is why I think it is money wasted sending me to Oxford."

"Not at all," said Mr. Tremerehere. "It is not for work alone that men go to Oxford. It always tells well in society. Not a high degree, or honours, or anything of that sort; for unless you are going into a profession the world cares very little for Senior Wranglers, &c. But you make friends who can help you in life, and widen your acquaintance, and learn a great deal that is quite as important. Yes, yes, you must go to college; but after? As I asked before—"

"I don't know, sir," said Edward, "my mother used to talk of the Bar, not knowing how stupid I was. But that would never do. I don't seem to have any particular choice; anything that pleases other people—"

"You are too good, I am afraid," said his father. "Your mother can't go on thinking for you—"

"So she says," said the boy with a laugh. At this moment they met a group of other lads with blue ribbons who stared at Eddy's appearance here; he nodded to them with a look of dejection. "The rest of the fellows are dining together," he said. "It is rather fun; but I don't suppose I shall mind."

"And you came away without telling me! That was kind of you, Ned. But I hope you will enjoy yourself with us. You will see a great difference in Vera. She is almost grown up, and I shall soon have to think of getting her brought out and introduced into society, which is a great bore for me. So you see we all have our difficulties. I am still in that same old house which you remember. It will be pleasant to dine together this one night."

"Yes," said Edward, somewhat disconsolately. He would have liked the dinner with his comrades better, but he was too good to put his own wishes forward. And Mr. Tremerehere thought no more about it. He told him of several young potentates at Oxford whom he should introduce him to. "And I hope you will be very careful about the set you get into. Whatever you may do in the way of scholarship you must never be indifferent to the art of making friends."

"That is what my mother says," said the lad, a statement which made his father stare. "She says that if I get into a good reading set—"

Mr. Tremerehere laughed. "That is very like your mother," he said, "but not exactly what I meant. If you are weak in scholarship don't go in for it, my boy. What I mean is a good set of men, men whom it will be of use for you to know, who may give you a helping hand in life, or at least in society. A great deal depends on that."

"Yes," said Eddy dutifully. "A good set of men" sounded much better to him than "the reading set," of whom he had been thinking with some alarm; but he did not so well understand about the "helping hand in life" to which his father referred. He was a perfectly humble simple-minded fellow, but yet he was not without a certain pride of his own.

Thus they went home to Hyde Park Square, where Mrs. Tremerehere, agitated by many thoughts, was preparing for dinner in her old room, now empty, swept, and garnished, and asking herself various questions which she could not answer, which she did not like even to put in words. There was a little pause when they all came together in the drawing-room, a little holding of the breath, or so she thought. It was late and beginning to be twilight, and I cannot describe with what a strange thrill of curiosity Edward looked at his two parents thus brought together. What could they be thinking, these two people who belonged to each other, yet did not belong to each other? And—whose fault was it? The boy was instinctively respectful and dutiful, and made no reply to himself, but yet the question arose in his mind whether he would or not.

"I have been speaking to Ned about his future," said Mr. Tremerehere. "He does not seem to be very clear what he is to do after Oxford."

"No. We must let circumstances decide," said his mother. "Perhaps if he reads hard—"

"My dear Ada, I wouldn't interfere with you for the world, but why should he read if that is not the turn of his mind?" said Mr. Tremerehere.

"It is the turn his mind ought to take," she said. "It is the only use so far as I can see of a University. What were colleges instituted for but reading? And it is his duty as well as the best thing to do."

"Well, I think there are other uses for Universities," said Mr. Tremerehere. "Is that you, Vera? come here; your mother cannot see you in this light. You would not think, would you," he added, with some pride, "that this demure little person was the saucy Vera who used to poke her small fingers into everything?" He laid his hand upon her head caressingly—not that he was much in the habit of caressing her, but he felt a natural impulse to put forth his own production as it were by the side of his wife's, in an amiable rivalry which had no evil intention in it. For, indeed, though he felt proud of his son, and was pleased with him, he was not at all jealous of his son's mother, to whom the boy specially belonged, and could not have understood the sharp and keen jealousy of himself, almost bitter, which shot like an arrow through Mrs. Tremerehere's heart as he laid his hand on Vera's head.

"I had no objections to the saucy Vera," she said, hurriedly forcing herself to smile.

"Ah, that is not my ideal of a young woman," said the father, equally unaware how much of the original heaven remained in the demure little person of whose quietness he was so proud.

Mrs. Tremerehere restrained herself as by force and made no reply, though all the old lively impulses of contradiction seemed to spring up in her as she listened; and thus the divided family remained for a moment silent, the father and son standing together, the mother and daughter seated in the shadow. Miss Campbell kept apart at the farthest window with a book in her hand. She disapproved profoundly of Mrs. Tremerehere. What did she want in this house which she had left of her own accord? Did she mean to come back disturbing other people in the established routine of their life, perhaps turning the carefully-trained Vera into something fast and disorderly? Such a woman was capable of anything, Miss Campbell thought, and the poor lady had an excuse for her dislike in her growing alarm and terror. She had a very comfortable position in Mr. Tremerehere's house, and was fond of Vera in her way, and if she left Hyde Park Square there was at her age little before her, except poor genteel lodgings on a small annuity, or the "Home."

When Miss Meadows came in with young Fane, followed at a moment's interval by the stray man, adapted to fill a place at an emergency, whom Mr. Tremerehere had met at Lord's, the family were not sorry. Perhaps, on the whole, it was more easy to get on when there were strangers present. There was an awkward moment, however, when they went to dinner. Mr. Tremerehere went across the room to Miss Campbell before the procession started.

"Perhaps," he said, in a slightly nervous tone, "it would be better if Vera took the head of the table to-day?"

"It must be exactly as you please, Mr. Tremerehere," she replied stiffly, giving him no assistance. And then he had to give his wife his arm, and hand her downstairs.

"You are the greatest stranger, Ada," he cried, with a nervous laugh, and attempt at jaunty. "The guest of the evening!"

She did not say anything, but put her hand within his arm as if she had been in a dream. But after that, the small party round the dinner-table went on quite smoothly. Vera, her cheeks burning, sat at the head of the table, feeling wretched, ashamed, and proud. She could not bear to look at her mother, who ought to have been occupying that place, and yet could look at nothing else, not even at Eddy, who kept smiling at her, shy but genial. She did not even notice, for five minutes at least, the handsome countenance of Oswald Fane at her left hand, though it was one which few girls of Vera's age looked at with absolute indifference. He had one of those picturesque dark faces which physiognomists suspect and sentimentalists love; dark eyes, liquid and persuasive, capable of looking unutterable things; dark hair, curling crisply round a well-shaped head; a smile on the curved lips, just shaded with a soft line of moustache which no unsuspecting person could resist. And he had judgment to add to his personal attractions. He saw Vera's agitation, and neither spoke nor looked at her for these five minutes, but chattered pleasantly to Elinor Meadows, shielding her from observation. Then when Vera began to get used to her position, and to calm out of her excitement, he threw over Elinor and struck in:

"You were very much interested in the match to-day, Miss Tremerehere. Was it for the sake of cricket? Some ladies, I know, are great connoisseurs—"

"Oh, no! I don't know anything about cricket. My brother was playing."

"I know; and I knew that was the reason, if you will let me say so. Cricketing young ladies don't look as you looked."

"I? How did I look? Not very odd I hope?" said Vera.

"Miss Campbell says I am always showing my feelings."

"I must not trust myself to description," he said. "Your look raised very violent emotions in my mind. Yes, I may as well confess. I turned immediately to the men in the field, and I said to myself, 'A set of wretched schoolboys. What have they done, I wonder, with their stupid game that any idiot could play, to deserve that!'"

"Mr. Fane! I hope you don't mean what you say!" cried Vera, indignantly, raising her head, "because I am Edward's sister. No one ought to speak like that, knowing that my brother is Captain of the Eleven."

"I told you, you had raised diabolical passions in my breast," said Fane, unmoved. "Envy, hatred, and jealousy; because you see, I knew very well that if I were to do the greatest feat that a man could do, no one would look so at me."

"Ah!" said Vera, mollified, drawing a breath of relief; "then you have no sister," she added softly, looking at him for the first time with interest.

Here I think it was the duty of Elinor to have interfered; but she was much amused; and she was, as she avowed boldly, half in love herself, in an elderly fashion, with Oswald Fane.

"No," he said, "I am all alone in the world. It does not matter to any one what I do or what I don't do; so you must forgive me my grudge at that happy fellow you were watching. I did not intend him any harm."

"Eddy played very well to-day," said the friend of the family, who sat at Vera's right hand. "Made a good score. Saved that last innings, he did. I don't like to see my old school beaten, though I'm an old fellow. I give you leave to be proud of your brother, Vera. I never saw a neater catch. It made a man feel young again."

"I am very proud of him, thanks," said Vera beaming. She looked at Eddy almost for the first time. His face was very serious, poor fellow. He was sitting next to Miss Campbell, who addressed instructive conversation to him, as she thought it was her duty to do with the young. And alas, I fear, poor Eddy, though he was at home, with all the members of his family round him, was thinking ruefully of the gay dinner at which the others were drinking their toasts and making their speeches. This certainly was not so lively. He did not see Vera look at him, but he met his mother's eye, and smiled, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. Vera saw this pantomime, and was angry. Was he not glad to be at home?

Thus the dinner was not the greatest of successes; and the ordeal of the drawing-room was still more severe. Mr. Tremerehere walked up to his wife when he came upstairs, and sat down beside her.

"I could not say anything to you at dinner," he said, "Ada; but I want now just to say a word. Don't press the scholarship business upon Ned. You can afford to send him to Oxford, and he can afford to go; that is, he is young enough not to be losing his time; but don't worry him and strain him to do something out of his line altogether. There, I don't want to interfere; but this you must let me say."

"Thank you," she said, a little stiffly, "I will think of it, Charles. Of course your advice in respect to Eddy must always have the greatest weight."

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"Well, yes, I think it ought," said the father, "especially as there has never been any quarrel, so to speak, between us. We have always been quite good friends."

"Perfectly good friends; if you will allow me in my turn to make a remark, I think poor Vera's natural vivacity is too much repressed. Miss Campbell, I have no doubt, is a very good woman, but Vera will never be really one of those meek girls whom you admire. She has a great deal of energy and spirit in her. I think you should take care not to carry the subduing process too far."

"Ah!" he said, raising his eyebrows, "do you think so? I should not have supposed that would have occurred to you. Miss Campbell's process seems to me to have answered admirably. However, I will keep my eye upon her since you think so. Curious! I expected you to compliment me, as everybody does."

"Yes, and so I do; she has grown up very sweet and fair," she said, with some emotion.
"But only you don't approve of the way in which she has been brought up," he said, with a laugh. "Well, well, we never did agree, and it is evident we were never intended to agree. Ada; which does not, however, prevent me from giving, as you say, the greatest weight to your advice, and from our continuing the best of friends."

With this he grasped her hand heartily, and rising from his chair beside her, went off to talk to Edward, whom old Mr. Carnaby was cross-questioning. Mrs. Tremenehere sat alone for a time. Near the open window, with its long lace curtains swaying softly in the summer air, sat Vera beside Miss Meadows, looking up into the dark, handsome face of young Fane, who bent over her. I don't think it occurred to the mother to take any notice about young Fane. She had subjects enough to occupy her mind without that. But whether by inadvertence or purpose, I cannot tell which, Elinor Meadows rose up suddenly, and came and joined her, leaving the two young people together—Miss Campbell, not being able to put up with this overturn of all her habits, having left the room.

"Well," said Elinor, eagerly, "have you settled anything? Indeed you ought to have come to your senses, you two, at your age."

"Perhaps we ought," said Mrs. Tremenehere, "but nothing is changed that I can see. Age makes little difference. For Vera's sake I might risk it, but he has no such idea; he is too triumphant in his own success."

"Then nothing is to come of it; what was the good then?" cried Elinor, with tears in her eyes. "Ada! Ada! I thought you would have done anything for poor little Vera's sake."

"I suppose it is only justice," said Mrs. Tremenehere, with a slight faltering, "when he would have made it up I wouldn't; and now when perhaps—I don't know—I might—"

"Is that all you say? when of course you would, that or anything else, for Vera's sake."

"Well, put it as you please; but anyhow it would be a failure. We should begin again to contradict each other the very next day. However, it is needless to discuss the question, for he does not wish it; that is as clear as daylight."

A little while after the two halves of the divided family said goodbye to each other, and the mother and son went back to their separate lodgings with Elinor, like any other visitors.

"Well, Eddy, have you spent a happy evening?" said Miss Meadows, in the darkness of the carriage, driving home.

"Oh, happy? well enough," said Edward. "Of course I was glad to see my father and Vera; still it was a bore not to be at the dinner with the other fellows, and this my last year."

The next step after this strange family meeting was taken in all innocence, with no thought of the complications it might lead to. Mr. Tremenehere consented that Vera should pay a visit to her mother in the country, under the charge of Elinor Meadows. It was to be for two days only, too short a time to have much effect upon the girl, one way or another—Miss Meadows, however, did not tell any one that on her own responsibility she had offered a seat in her carriage, and an introduction into her friend's house, to Oswald Fane.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VILLA.

MRS. TREMEHERE rather prided herself on her society; though she had given up so much she had never given up that; the people she knew were not commonplace people such as you meet everywhere, but persons of high intelligence, of advanced opinions, people known in literature, in art, and in science. Her parties were generally in summer, daylight parties, a combination of outdoor pleasures, concluding with that good dinner which mortal men, even when they are philosophers, love. When the little party arrived from town they found preparations going on for one of these gatherings. Mrs. Tremenehere took Vera through the garden and shady grounds, which were skillfully planted to look double their size, and showed her everything with tender anxiety. "You must help me to receive my friends," she said, smiling upon her little daughter.

"What would Miss Campbell say? she is not 'out,' of course," said Elinor.

"A girl does not require to be 'out' when she is by her mother's side," said Mrs. Tremenehere with a sigh, drawing Vera's hand within her arm. It was not for Vera she said this, but for the relief of her own mind; but Vera heard it, and ventured to clasp her mother's arm with a sudden sense of security, such as she thought she had never experienced before. By her mother's side—very different from Miss Campbell's; everything was made natural, everything as it ought to be, by that one fact. She turned round without knowing why, and met Fane's dark eyes fixed upon her; never before had innocent Vera met such looks; and a soft suffusion, the first blush of tender youth, came over her white throat and delicate cheeks. She clung a little closer to her mother's arm. Yes, even this, the confused sweet guiltiness, the innocent shame where no shame was, all were without danger, without harm there—by her mother's side.

Then the strangers began to arrive, but first of all came Edward, fresh from school, happy and radiant in the delight of "leave," and the whole day to himself, though not so happy about "the party."

"To be sure we can have some croquet," said Edward, "though that is not much; but with such a terrible set of swells what else can one do?"

"There is a swell coming who will fascinate you, Eddy," said his mother. The lad shrugged his shoulders with a laugh.

"All right if they please you, mamma," he said, putting his arm round her with a happy ease which made Vera wonder. Fancy any one doing that to papa, she said to herself—or Miss Campbell! After a while Edward dragged her off to see the croquet-ground, where the implements of that diversion were all in order. "Between ourselves it is a bore rather," he said; "a

lot of bigwigs all talking as if to talk was the best thing in the world; but never mind, it pleases the mother. And then a day's leave is always a day's leave," he added, with good-humoured philosophy. It was Edward's disposition to make the best of everything.

"And I have a day's leave, too," said Vera, with a little sigh; "but I can't have one whenever I please, Eddy, like you."

"Whenever I please!" he looked at her with natural contempt for her ignorance; but then what can a girl be expected to know? "Why can't you stay?" he said; "it would be much jollier if you were here. Why can't we all live together, as we used to do—as we ought to do?" the boy added, suddenly.

This conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Fane, who was never long absent from Vera's elbow, and by the gradual arrival of the visitors—among whom, as I have said, there was one celebrity of the moment whom it was a very great honour to produce here so far out of town. While the young people were in the garden Elinor Meadows came rushing towards them, her black lace billowing around her, and the rings of her grey hair blown about her forehead.

"Come!" she cried, breathless, "come, before there is a crowd, and be introduced to him, both of you. You, too, Oswald, if you like,—only make haste and come."

"Who is it?" they all asked in a breath.

"It is the lion—and a real great roaring lion, shaking his mane—none of your make-believes, that don't know how to keep it up. It is Mr. Buckram Bass, the great African traveller. He has been everywhere where nobody ever was before. Come, you foolish boys and girls. You may never have another such opportunity. Come, Vera; and Edward especially,—you must come."

"Presently. I shall see him soon enough," said Edward.

He would not come in. He was busy out of doors, looking after the croquet, showing the finer points of view to one wandering group after another, pointing out the pinnacles of the great school in the distance, telling the names of the distant places, and also the names of the notabilities present to his mother's guests.

"That is Dr. Jones, the great geologist, I believe—and that lady yonder, in the corner with a lot of people round her, is the lady that plays the fiddle—well, yes, violin, it's all the same, isn't it? I daresay my mother will get her to play after dinner. And that is the Bishop of St. James's, who is an old friend of my mother's."

"Will he preach after dinner?" said some one, hoping to be witty.

"I hope not," said Edward, gravely. "I don't think he is a fool, nor my mother either. There is the editor of the 'Northley,' whom you may have heard of, and Miss Cloots, who writes novels. By the way, I believe there is somebody here who is the very last novelty in the way of travels. The great African man, that—"

"Hush!" said Elinor Meadows, by his side.

"Why should he hush? I wish he had described me as well as he described the rest," said Mr. Buckram Bass himself, stepping into the circle. "This is Mrs. Tremenehere's son, the hero of the cricket, and why has he not been introduced to me? There spoke the true spirit of youth! not feelings!—When his time comes, ladies, he will experience them, at present he does not care to have any babbling about them. Bravo! those are my sentiments exactly. Let us shake hands upon it. Yes, what is worth is doing—not to talk, not to read, but to do. Schools! yes, schools are excellent. I do not say a word against schools. I myself was not created by any school, but what does that matter? When I was your age I rebelled against books. I felt myself a slave. To tie me down," cried the lion, roaring loudly, and grasping his red beard—he was a large man, handsome, and even commanding in appearance, and when he spoke, took a large handful of the vast beard which he had grown during his travels—"to tie me down with all my energies fettered, to construe Herodotus! when I knew there were things in the world more wonderful than Herodotus—and true."

Edward had looked at him, half contemptuously, half suspiciously when he began. Gradually, however, his looks changed. His eyes began to glow, then to glow. The lion man and his beard impressed him. "More wonderful than Herodotus—and true!" He forgot his natural opposition to the lion. After all, if this was a lion, he was so because of what he had done, not of what he had said or written. He began to look eagerly at this new kind of man.

"Do you know anything about Africa?" said the traveller. "No! The great continent of the future!—the real new world, teeming with wealth, full of wonder, from which there is everything to expect. Take a walk with me through your mother's pretty grounds. That moment that his face I see, I know the man that must hear me."

With this the adventurer thrust his great arm through Edward's and led him away, half pleased, half reluctant. The others who stood round heard his big voice discoursing as he promenade through the shrubbery.

Nothing more was seen of Eddy that day, except at dinner, during which he was very absent and distant, straining his attention to make out what Mr. Buckram Bass was saying at the other end of the table. He reappeared in the evening, but only in the train of the traveller, who was delighted by the boy's enthusiasm. Few people noticed even then that it was Edward he was talking, for the talk was addressed to the whole gathering, as well as to that one particular boy who stood close by him, his eyes gleaming, his whole aspect changed.

"Yes, yes, you are right, and I respect you for it," said the traveller. "This is not a time for music, for the fine arts, for poetry, and feeling. What men want is to be doing. You know where I am going to—what I call the Continent of the future, that great mysterious Africa, to one corner of which the roots of our religion itself still cling. Is it not a work worthy of Christianity to carry freedom and civilisation back to the warm, rich, teeming countries where so much wealth and capability lie dormant? Yes, sir, take the question at its lowest, nothing could be more admirable for trade. In that view alone it is worth doing—opening up not a single nation like France or Germany, but a crowd of nations, a whole continent, to British enterprise. But I don't profess myself to take that point of view. My mind is burdened with the thought of so many fine interesting races, so many tribes and peoples, as varied as Europeans, not stupid negroes only, who are living in mud cabins, under savage laws, decimated by fever and by each other, whom we might help with a little trouble into civilisation and humanity. My expedition starts in October. It is not all filled up. How thankful I should be to have volunteers, sportsmen, adventurers, whatever you please to call them. Every new traveller is so much gain."

"For heaven's sake, Ada, do something to stop that man," cried Elinor Meadows in Mrs. Tremenehere's ear. "Ask somebody to play; let us do something."

"Why? I find him very interesting," said Mrs. Tremenehere,

smiling calmly in her friend's face, "and he always does this, you know, wherever he goes. It is tacitly understood."

"Look at Edward's face."

"Yes, he is interested, poor boy. I am so glad that he should have had his mind roused by some new subject." Edward stood by his new apostle, his eyes fixed upon him, swallowing every word with eager interest. Already he saw himself in imagination with a wild retinue of Arabs and negroes tramping through the jungle, pressing over the sands, passing from one savage court to another. He had read all the books upon the subject eagerly, but there was a man who was a living book, who had seen and heard and done, and was about to do again, all these wonders. Edward's mind, newly aroused within him, expanded and grew. He seemed to feel himself grow strong and daring and patient as he listened. Yes, that was the life—not a sham life at college, making good friends as his father said, or labouring vainly after scholarship as his mother wished.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VILLA (continued).

MEANWHILE the day had passed for Vera like a strange sweet dream, too rapid, too full of feeling to be understood. The novelty and the strangeness and the complication of emotions so suddenly introduced into her young life, which had been carefully trained to know no emotions at all, involved her in a secret bewilderment, so that she did not seem to know what she was saying, or on what she was treading, whether enchanted ground, or air, or clouds. When she was about to follow the rest indoors, Fane, who was with her, begged so hard that she would stay, that Vera, not unwilling, though a little doubtful as to whether she ought, softly sat down again on the rustic seat under the lime trees, which were so sweet in the dimness of the night. Fane said nothing for a few minutes; he let the silence and charm of the night steal into the girl's soul.

"I wanted to drive on for ever this morning," at last he said softly; "what a mistake it was! But now, if this night would only last for ever! I don't know what more one could wish for. Do you remember 'The Last Ride'?"

"What is 'The Last Ride'?" said Vera, wondering if it was very, very ignorant of her not to know.

"It is a poem of Mr. Browning's."

"I don't think I like poetry," said Vera, shyly. "It seems dreadful to say so, but one ought to be honest. It is so stiff and so formal, not like anything natural."

"What have you read? I think I could show you some you would like."

"I have read some of Pope, and Miss Campbell is very fond of Young's 'Night Thoughts' and Kirke White—and a little Cowper. I like Cowper best, but—"

"Ah!" he said. "Shall I tell you about the 'Last Ride'?"

It is very different from Pope. It is a poor lover whom his lady has refused. He loves her, but she does not love him. Yet though she does not love him, she is sweet and gracious, and will not refuse the last thing he asks of her,—one last ride with him. And so they set out; and as they go along he keeps comforting himself all the way, knowing every step is nearer the end—Perhaps the world may end to-night."

"And what happens?" asked Vera, eagerly.

"Nothing happens; the ride may be going on still for all one knows."

Vera was silent. She was too young to understand how this ending of the world might have helped the hapless lover. She sat quite still, in shy wonder, feeling sad for him; wishing that the lady had relented, which would have been better than the world ending; her thoughts entirely carried away even from the present enchantment. Then her companion spoke again; his voice was very soft and naturally melodious, and there was a certain pleading in the tone:

"I wonder," he said, "if I am to be sent away to-night."

"To be sent away?"

"Miss Meadows brought me. She is not going till to-morrow. She is as good as gold, but she is apt to forget details."

"Oh, shall I run in and ask?" cried Vera. "How disagreeable for you to be kept here. I will run and tell her."

"No, indeed, you shall not run anywhere to serve me. It is I who will run—wherever you please—to do anything you please. But don't be satirical or hard upon me. The dreadful thing will be to be sent away. I prefer to keep out of the way till it is too late."

Again Vera did not quite understand, and was silent, thinking it best not to commit herself. But she began to be a little uneasy about sitting here quite alone while everybody else had gone in. It was strangely pleasant—so warm, yet so cool, so fresh and dewy, the house so near with all its lights, yet the stillness so perfect. Would it be right, though, if not so pleasant, to go back to the house?

"Can you see beyond the garden, the lights scattered about in the houses," he said, "and up in the sky the stars? I don't know which I like best."

"Oh, Mr. Fane, the stars!"

"Do you think so?—but see, every one of these little lights twinkling away far down at the foot of the hill means something. There are people there talking, living—with a story of one kind or another—and love. Is it not pleasant," he said, as she made no answer, "to sit here and watch it all—all the other people going on with their living, and we looking on?"

"But we are living, too," said Vera, startled.

"Beginning to live—"

He did not say any more. And how still it was—every little rustle in the leaves audible, though there was so much life and sound close at hand. Vera began to feel a little frightened. All these strangenesses seemed coming to a climax. She gave a little start when some watchful bird made a stir among the branches, and got up. "I think mamma may want me. I think we should go in," she said.

More than half the people were gone, however, when they went in, and the last train was gone, and there was nothing for it but to offer Mr. Fane, whom Elinor Meadows confessed she had forgotten, a bed. Vera coming in shy and dazzled by the lights did not quite listen to all that was said; but to know that he was going to stay was pleasant. He sat down by her again, while her mother was occupied with the last of the departing groups. Somehow she seemed to know him better than any one—better even than her mother, to whom she was so much a stranger; and here indoors, with so many people about, it was easier to talk. She confessed to him with a little blush that she had never been here before.

"Is it not strange?" she said, "it is home, as much as the Square, and yet I don't know it. People are not often like that. I suppose you used to live with your mother when you were young, as young as I am—most people do."

"Most people do, but I did not, for my mother was dead. I was very lonely—my brother a great deal older than myself, and no one else belonging to me."

"Ah! my brother is only two years older than me; but then if one never sees them it comes to just the same thing. I was very lonely, too. Never anybody to play with," said Vera, tears coming into her eyes out of pity for the forlorn little self whom she had conjured up. "Nobody to talk to—except Miss Campbell. I remember," she went on, changing involuntarily into a soft laugh; "I got the poor servants into sad trouble because I told papa they had a party and I danced. Oh! how nice that party was. I was only eight. It couldn't have done me much harm, could it?"

"Evidently it has not done you any harm," said Fane. "Nothing could do you any harm. I ran wild as I liked, and no one was shocked."

"Ah!" cried Vera again, with a sigh, "you boys are so much better off than girls. Nobody says you ought to be still, never to talk, never to be remarked. It is hard always to be obliged to remember that one is a girl. Miss Campbell always says, 'You forget yourself,' when that is just what I should like to do. Forget all about me! Why should one always be obliged to think about one's self?"

"When there are so many other people that would be too glad to do it for you!" said Fane: a speech which, like many others, was lost upon Vera. But the fountain was opened of her confidences, and she went on almost without a pause.

"It is now so many years since Miss Campbell came, and I have been obliged to be so good. I don't think I was good before. And when I go back again I shall have to begin once more, and try not to forget myself, and to speak low, and to keep in the background, and not 'to be remarked.' Why should any one remark me?" cried Vera. "It is very hard upon us poor girls, you must allow, Mr. Fane."

"And when do you go back?"

"To-morrow!" she said, with a long-drawn breath, a sigh so pathetic, that it was all he could do, notwithstanding his profound sympathy, not to laugh.

"I wonder if I might call," he said. "I should like to bring you some books. I should like to try to amuse—Miss Campbell a little. Do you think I might come?"

"Miss Campbell!" said Vera, somewhat disappointed; then she recollected that it would still be better than nothing to be amused even at second hand. "Papa never said nobody was to call. People do call, not very amusing people, and if it is Miss Campbell you want to see—"

"Yes, of course it is Miss Campbell," he said, laughing. Upon which Vera understood, and laughed and blushed, and between the two this seemed the very best of jokes. They kept laughing at it at intervals as they went on talking.

"I am the victim of a romantic but hopeless passion," said Fane. "If Miss Campbell will not smile upon me, what will become of me?" and it seemed to Vera that the humour was exquisite. All at once Miss Campbell and the Square seemed to be suffused with the same rosy light which made the villa such a world of enchantment. Elinor Meadows looked back at them, somewhat uneasily, wondering if it was quite right, if Oswald was quite to be trusted, if he knew where he was leading that innocent child. She became frightened at her own handiwork. Mrs. Tremenehere, on the other side, heard the laugh, and looked gratefully at the young stranger who called forth so merry a laugh from Vera. Thus tolerated and protected, the two young creatures felt secure in their corner, and talked and smiled, and poured out their hearts to each other, they could not tell why, and were more happy than they could say.

Next day was quieter, but still more sweet. They went out, the whole little party, and strayed about the lanes, and visited the school where Edward, still very absent, showed them everything, and saw the boys playing cricket as on that wonderful day which had made a new beginning to Vera's life.

It was late in the evening when they returned to town, their party increased by the addition of one of Mrs. Tremenehere's neighbours. It was not at all the same as the drive down. That had been merry, brilliant, a little company of three all united in one. This was different. You cannot lean across a carriage to talk in the dimness of the night, though two who are seated next each other may say much. The lady who sat by Miss Meadows had a great deal of conversation, and occupied her so, that at the end of the journey she half apologised to Vera.

"I have never been able to say a word to you," said Elinor. "That tiresome woman! You must forgive me, my dear."

Vera forgave her very freely. She leaned back upon the soft cushions, quite indifferent to the fact that she had her back to the horses. She could not see him very well in the dusk, but she could see how he looked at her, which is different. Why should he look so, as nobody else ever looked? It was strange, but it was pleasant; and he spoke so low, not to disturb the others, that she had to lean her head towards him to hear. And once by accident (he begged her pardon for it) their fingers just touched; and she heard him say to himself softly,

"Perhaps the world may end to-night."

Vera would not have acknowledged for the world that she had heard it, but she began to understand now what these words which had seemed so strangely unsatisfactory and unintelligible meant. Alas! When they came to Hyde Park Square, and the steps were let down, and the door opened, and old Jervis appeared on the threshold waiting for her, had not the world indeed suddenly come to an end? When the door shut upon that fairy chariot, and she was left standing in the half-lighted, dull, drab, too-familiar hall, the very heart seemed to die out of Vera's bosom. She shivered all over, feeling cold, and would have liked to cry.

"Is anything wrong, Miss?" said Jervis, sympathetically.

"Oh no, no, nothing!" cried Vera, with a sob in her throat; and stole softly upstairs, a forlorn little white ghost. Alas! the world had ended—but not in the poet's way.

CHAPTER X.

EDWARD

EDWARD went back to his schoolwork next day with the excitement of the last night buzzing through his head. He was a schoolboy according to English custom, and yet he was a man. He went back to his constraining, over which at the best he always hesitated, and his composition, in which he gained much less applause, though he worked at it twice as laboriously, as the little fellow next to him, who carried off all the honours; and as he worked he said to himself, fustle of all questions for learner or worker, "What is the good of it?" When a man could be carrying civilisation to a continent—when he could be opening paths for knowledge, for education, for trade, for human advancement, when he could be changing savages into Christians, teaching them those things which make all the difference between man

and brute,—in short, when he could be doing what Mr. Bass had done, what he was going once more to do, shooting huge game, encountering lions, exterminating serpents in the jungle, besides all other more elevated occupations; the thought of this sent a thrill through the lad's veins. Oxford! What should he do at Oxford? Stumble through one examination after another, each less successful than the first, take a pass degree, disappoint his mother's hopes, and, for the very best he could do, make friends according to his father's directions. Make friends! not for the sake of friendship and mutual help and brotherhood, which was a thing Eddy's honest soul comprehended thoroughly, but to help him on in life. That was all he could do. Was it worth going to Oxford on the strength of that?

The visit of his sister and the others partially freed his mind from this haunting vision, but it came on stronger than ever next day when they were gone; and in the evening he went to see his mother, whom he found somewhat despondent after the excitement of the two days past. She was sitting by herself in the evening looking wearily over her beautiful view. It was very delightful so long as there was some one there to point it out, to see the sudden lights and shadows; but when one is all alone, a fine landscape is more trial than pleasure. Close the curtains, light the lamp, turn indoors to your books and to your pictures, lonely one. Do not look abroad upon that quiet scene nature which was made for the happy. The wistful lights, the gathering dimness, the falling dew, the home-going of all things—birds to the nest, labourers to the cottage, are a sight too exquisite for you.

Edward found his mother looking out on that evening scene, and commanded her peremptorily, in those terms which mothers are so easily moved to obey, to get her hat and come out with him. "I believe you have been crying all by yourself," he said indignantly.

"I shall cry now, Eddy—when my boy is here," she said with a smile.

What a blow that gave him, though she did not know it! But then he recollected that to be absent at Oxford was as bad as to be absent in Africa, and this gave him courage to begin.

"I have something very particular to say to you, mother. Come out, please. I can always talk to you better out of doors."

"What is the matter, Eddy? Are the small boys unruly? Have you got into trouble about your composition—"

"No, no. Come, mother, I have a great deal to say to you. I have not said anything to you for a long time about myself."

"You never do say very much about yourself, dear."

"Yes, I do; quite as much as other fellows—and I think a deal. Mother, what is the good of sending me to the University? I was talking to Somerville about it, to-day."

"And what does the great Somerville, who knows everything, say?" asked Mrs. Tremenehere, mamma.

"You don't do him justice, mamma. If I talk too much about him that is my fault, not his. He wants me to go, of course. He says there are other things besides scholarship, but he allows that it is not much use so far as scholarship goes. Don't be disappointed, mother. You know I always said so."

"And do you think I am going to take Somerville's word for it, Eddy? Your tutor says you will do very well."

"So I should hope," said Edward, with a flush on his face; "I should not be rowdy or make a beast of myself; that's what he means, I suppose; it would be a joke if I couldn't do well in that sense. And I might get into the 'Varsity Eleven like enough, which isn't bad—but for anything else—"

If you were to be satisfied with that I shouldn't mind, but even at Lord's—why you know you did not care a bit about it, mamma."

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said Mrs. Tremenehere, humbly, "I care for everything you take an interest in; but I don't deny I would rather have seen my son come out first in an examination than be the captain of the Eleven."

"Yes, that is your way of thinking," said the boy, "I know; you don't care much for what I can do, and I cannot do what you really care for. But if scholarship is out of the question, you don't care for the 'Varsity Eleven, do you, or for the 'making friends' dodge? I can't bear that 'making friends'."

"My dear boy, you make friends everywhere."

"Ah, that's different; friends at school that one makes because one likes them—but friends to help you on in the world! Don't send me to Oxford, mamma; of course I shall go if you wish it—if you insist upon it."

"Eddy, I wish you would tell me honestly what you are thinking of; there is something behind all this," said Mrs. Tremenehere, but still she smiled, and was not afraid.

"I will tell you what I am thinking of," he said, rather tremulously; "reading and that sort of thing will never be much in my way; it may be a pity, but it can't be helped. But, mamma, there are more things in the world than reading. I am a strong fellow; I could do heaps of things; I might be of real use all the same."

"I hope so, Eddy, but how, my dear? Out with it! You don't require to go and work for your living. Tell me what you want to do."

"Mamma," he said, his breath coming short, "I fear you will not like it; I hope you will not be angry. It came to me all at once when Mr. Bass was speaking; I could not help telling him that of all things in the world I should like to join his expedition—"

"You are raving, Eddy," said his mother, suddenly; and then she laughed; "you foolish boy, you gave me a fright for a moment. You might as well talk of going to the moon."

"I was afraid you would take it so; but I am not raving, I am quite entirely in earnest; it is the sort of thing I could do. You can't call a man like that useless, can you, mother? He is not one of the fine gentlemen, good for nothing, whom you dislike so; he knows what he can do, and is doing it. That is what I have set my heart on. I want to go with him to Africa."

She looked at him, stunned with the shock; stopped short in the middle of the road as if he had shot her, and looked at him.

"Eddy! you are out of your senses," she said.

The boy made no answer; he expected this, and more than this, knowing well that if it was done at all it could not be done without trouble. He did not say anything, but let the first force of the shock wear itself out.

"Oh!" she cried, "was it for this I brought him to my house? Eddy! you cannot be thinking what you are saying. You shall read all the books about this wretched Africa. It is mere nonsense, what he says about the new world, the Continent of the future. You should read what other travellers say. The most deluded miserable country—the people absolute savages. What am I saying? I am talking it too seriously. I know you will hear reason. This is just a boy's foolish fancy—the first wild idea that has come into your head."

"I don't think so, mother."

"But I know it. I know what ideas come into such a young

brain as yours, my dear boy. No more about it to-night, Eddy. I ought to have foreseen that he would have an effect upon you, for he is eloquent after a sort. The days are getting quite short already, and before we know, summer will be over. We have not settled where we are going for the holidays," she added, suddenly changing the subject with simple artifice. "Shall we go to Switzerland? This year I should not object if you climbed to your heart's content. You are old enough and strong enough to risk it now."

This would have made Edward's eyes sparkle a week before, but it had little effect upon him now.

"If you like, mother," he said, indifferently. "But I begin to think I have had enough play in my life."

"Your life—it is such a long one—eighteen!"

"Long enough for amusement," said Eddy, solemnly. "Now I want work."

Mrs. Tremenehere parted with her boy that evening with some dismay in her heart.

"I suppose it is just a fancy like any other," she said to herself; but it was an appalling fancy for an only son, a boy of so much importance in her life. She went back to the pretty house which had looked so cheerful and delightful to Vera, and felt it very dreary. Mrs. Tremenehere closed the shutters with her own hands to-night in a kind of suppressed passion, as if the country was her enemy. She could not endure its quiet and tranquillity. When the lamp was brought in the poor woman went and sat by it for company, and gazed into the light as if that could counsel her. A penic took possession of her soul. "Only a fancy like another," she repeated aloud, trying to take off the edge of her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DAY AFTER

NEXT day! It was a lovely summer day, but very hot and stifling in Hyde Park square. Miss Campbell did not permit her pupil so much as that wistful gaze from the window across the brown park and dusty trees which is the favourite consolation of such prisoners. She allowed no indulgence on account of an unsettled mind, but rather the reverse. And what a day it was! nothing but sunshine, heat, blazing pavements outside, airless rooms, all hot and heavy with the warm carpets and curtains of English use and wont. Vera read Rollin's Ancient History all the afternoon, not even trying, as she often did, to interest herself in Xerxes, but thinking all the time of yesterday, and of all that happened. "Perhaps the world may end to-night," What did he mean? Would he have liked it to go on, and on, that progress through the darkness, without seeing anything, without saying much, but now and then half-dozen words quite low, under cover of the lively chatter of the two people opposite? Was it possible that he would have liked that? As for Vera, she did not ask herself if she liked it. It had changed the world to her; it had given her a new world of her own into which she could retire safely, almost glad of the Rollin, and think it all over again,—the few words that meant so much, the consciousness of nearness and companionship, the dreamy sweep of movement through the soft night.

"Are you sleepy, my dear?" said Miss Campbell, somewhat sharply rousing her.

"No—no," said Vera.

"I thought you must be sleepy, you mumble your words so, and shut your eyes. I suppose you were kept up very late at the villa," the old governess said. She disliked the villa with an intensity of dislike such as mingled jealousy and fear alone could produce. She was afraid that any day Mrs. Tremenehere might come back and turn her out of a comfortable home; and she was jealous of the mother's influence with Vera, of whom in her way this hard-featured, hard-principled woman was fond, though she could not express her fondness in any ingratiating way. "Go on, my dear, and rouse yourself up," she said—and Vera went on; but when she shut her eyes she could see that scene, and feel it, as vividly as if it were still existing, and still within the possibilities that it might go on for ever; and then her voice would drop, and there would be a pause in the reading of which she was scarcely conscious; for dreaming even of that description in a hot July afternoon is akin to sleep.

"This will never do, Vera," said Miss Campbell; "I suppose your mother did not have a ball last night? Go and put on your hat; we may have our walk now, and perhaps that will rouse you up."

They went out for their walk when the afternoon was beginning to cool a little, and went to Kensington Gardens, which was the usual scene of their daily promenade. A demure little girl in a white frock, not even made quite "long" as yet, with a very precise, elderly lady by her, straight as a piece of iron, and as unbending—this sort of thing is to be seen in Kensington Gardens every day. They walked down the broad walk and up again, going quickly, but not too quickly, not to attract attention, Miss Campbell keeping a steady look-out around her, on her guard against any possible danger, Vera very silent, scarcely raising her eyes.

"Miss Campbell!" suddenly said a voice beside her, which made Vera's heart beat. She gave such a sudden start of surprise, and grew so red with wonder and joy, that Miss Campbell vaguely perceived with a corner of her eye that something was the matter. "This is a most unlooked-for pleasure. I have been waiting here wondering if I should see anybody I knew, now that all the world is pouring out of town. You are still in London? Ah!" said Oswald, coldly turning round and bowing.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Tremenehere," Vera, who was not used to such transparent deceptions, was wounded to her innocent heart. "So he does not care about seeing me! I am only an accident. He saw nobody but Miss Campbell!" the foolish little girl said to herself. And she did not trust herself to look at him lest he should see the hot tear which this mortification had forced into her eyes, and consequently never received the glance he sent to make up for his meagre salutation. Fane had as little doubt that she understood him perfectly, and was laughing secretly at his enthusiasm for Miss Campbell, as he had of his own existence.

"You have the advantage of me," said Miss Campbell. "I beg your pardon. One meets so many people in society—"

"Oswald Fane," he said. "I had the pleasure of dining the other day in Hyde Park Square—"

Miss Campbell gave him a keen glance. "I recollect," she said. "A friend, I think, of Mrs. Tremenehere's?"

What was he to say? Offend Vera by disclaiming any particular friendship with her mother, or ruin his hopes of Miss Campbell's help by claiming this? "I have known Mr. and Mrs. Tremenehere about the same time," he said, "and I have known some pleasure of visiting both. But I think I have known some relations of yours in Scotland longer than either—the Campbells of Stormaway? I am sure I have heard them talk of you."

"Really!" said Miss Campbell, gratified, "that was very



"AN ODD COUPLE"—VERA AND HER DOLLS

"Try and sit up like a lady," she said. "If you are all good, and don't make a noise, nor spoil your pinnies, I will tell you a story."



"AN ODD COUPLE"—THE ETON AND HARROW CRICKET MATCH

kind. I know the family you speak of—a very good family, but I cannot claim them as near relations. There is some far cousinship no doubt. It is gratifying to my feelings that they should know—Mr. Vane remember me; and have you seen them lately Mr.—Mr. Vane?"

"Fane. I met them in Scotland last year; indeed, I was at their house for a few days. What a pleasant place to visit is a Highland country house! Of course you remember your cousin's delightful place?"

"Yes—yes—that is, I have been there very seldom, Mr. Fane; very seldom, not since a child, I may say; and no doubt there are additions and alterations—"

"They said it was a long time since they had seen you, and I promised to let them know if I happened to meet you anywhere. A fortunate chance, was it not? The daughters have grown up charming girls, and as for Hector and Colin—"

"Yes—yes," said Miss Campbell. She was for the moment quite bamboozled; was he trying to deceive her, or was it really true that the Highland magnates, whose names alone she was acquainted with, had found out and recognised her as their kinswoman? After the first flush of gratification she became uncertain, and did not know what to think. He had turned, and was walking along with them. But he walked by Miss Campbell's side, taking no notice of Vera, who for her part went along with downcast eyes, offended and never looking at him.

"By the way," he said, "Miss Meadows, who is out of town for a few days, gave me some books for Miss Tremerehere. May I bring them? I am going away myself shortly. One day this week may I bring them and discharge my conscience of my commission before I go?"

"Oh, pray do not take the trouble. I will send a servant," said Miss Campbell, who had seen a sudden lifting of Vera's eyes. "This is our way, I think. Do not take the trouble. I must bid you good morning, Mr. Fane."

And he took his leave of them quite calmly, though he was going away. Vera was so startled, so wounded, so suddenly thrown down out of all those sweet vague dreams in which she had been indulging, that she could not raise her eyes. Tears came so easily at sixteen. If he had really gone and she had seen no more of him, Vera, after that sharp shock of mortification and disappointment which made her poor little lip quiver and her eyes fill, would no doubt have forgotten all about Oswald Fane. But in the meantime the blow of his supposed indifference and the sudden cruel end put all at once to the romance which was just beginning, crushed her for the moment, depressed as she was by other influences. She walked home by Miss Campbell's side with a piteous little face, not saying a word. Only once a little cry of impatience burst from her. "I do not believe that gentleman knew much about my cousins of Stormaway," Miss Campbell said. "I think it was very strange that he should have accosted me as he did, currying favour. If he is a friend of Miss Meadows I must request her not to send her messages by him. I am sure she has plenty of servants. I must tell her I do not approve of calls from gentlemen."

"Oh, you need not give yourself the trouble," said Vera; "he is not coming. He said it was to clear his conscience of his commission. He never wanted to come."

"So much the better," said Miss Campbell drily; and she talked about the Aquarium in the Zoological Gardens, which was a safe subject. Vera no longer trod on air; her dreams were gone and ended, her beautiful new world broken like a bubble. She went into her own room and cried, tears innocent and bitter, such as one sheds at sixteen, when every grief seems eternal. It was all over, then. Not only should she never see him more, but she had lost that sweet refuge into which she could retire as she had done this morning when the day was dull, when Miss Campbell was hard upon her.

Next morning however she had to go back to her lessons as usual. When these came to a pause before luncheon, she wandered into the drawing-room, intending to breathe forth some of her melancholy upon the grand piano. Some one rose as she went in. The girl grew red all over with a flush which was partly anger, and partly shame, and partly delight.

"Oh!" she said impetuously, not knowing what she said, "I thought you were gone."

"Did you really think so?" said Fane. "No, impossible. I came this morning that she might not have time to warn the servants not to admit me."

"But, Mr. Fane, of whom are you speaking? You seemed to know Miss Campbell so well—to like her—and her relations."

Fane laughed. Vera could not have explained what her feelings were at that moment. Her heart bounded, and yet she did not like it. Why should he deceive even Miss Campbell? She looked at him doubtfully—and yet how happy she was!

"You think I should not tell a fib? Quite true. But then how was I to see you? That was the first thing I had to think of; and there was no harm done. It was a very innocent fib. I could not give up tamely all hope of seeing you again."

Vera's cheek glowed and her heart beat. She did not say anything to check him—to demur to this statement. Was it not natural that he should want to see her? Had not she wanted too, though she would not say it, to see him?

"But you are going away?" she said softly, with a very little subdued sigh.

"Not I—not so long as there is any chance.—Here is the book I spoke to you about, and another. Take them, please, before the dragon comes; I fear, I fear, she will be here directly. Ah, Miss Tremerehere, you cannot think how I have thought about those two days at the villa, and lived them over and over! Shall not you go there again, or to Miss Meadows? She knows me. She would not shut me out; and now that I have seen you it does not seem possible to live just as one lived before. Life is different. It is so much sweeter—better; since that day at Lord's, that first wonderful day. I had never seen you till then."

Vera stood silent, with the books in her hands, her eyes cast down, her cheeks glowing, her heart beating high, yet soft—not wildly in her ears, as it had done a little while before, but with a satisfied and quiet beating. How true it all was! Life was different, quite different; and yet it did not seem right for him to say so. But to listen to him? Civility demanded that she should listen to any one who talked to her, especially when he was a visitor, and she at home.

"You are very kind, Mr. Fane," she said at last, faltering. That was not at all what she meant, but what could she say?

"Kind! It is you who are kind listening to me. Elinor Meadows would stand my friend if you were with her, and how good Mrs. Tremerehere was! But what must I do with this dragon? If I tell lies to her to please her, you will disapprove of me, and that I cannot bear; but still less can I bear not to see you. What can I do?"

"Mr. Fane: oh! please, don't speak so—and you said you were going away."

"I am going away when you go," he said, "for I shall find out where you go, and follow you—don't be angry, I can't help

it,—if it is only to see the light in your window. You wouldn't like me to fall back, and be just the poor creature I was before I knew you? Yes, of course, you are angry with me for telling lies, Vera—you, who are true to yourself; but the more I see you, the truer I shall be. Don't give me up, because I can't give you up. You are too sweet and too good to break my heart."

All this no doubt would have seemed over-bold and over-sudden to a girl of twenty; but how could Vera discriminate, she upon whom the same spell had fallen? Did not she, too, feel how different life was, how transformed from the pale grey routine, the stagnant repression of the days before? The strangeness and excitement of it made her breathless.

"Oh! don't talk so, please don't talk so," she cried.

"It is the only way I can talk," said Fane. "That is she, I saw you I knew what had happened to me. 'That is she,' I said to myself, 'that is good—there is none in all the world like her.' And—ah!—Good morning, Miss Campbell. I made bold to call to discharge my commission. Miss Tremerehere has got the books—"

"Good morning," said Miss Campbell. "What books? I never permit Miss Tremerehere to read anything that I have not first looked at myself."

"I have no doubt it is a very wise rule," he said, carelessly. "The books belong to Miss Meadows—it is she who sent me with them, and, of course, she is answerable. I shall say I put them into your own hands, Miss Tremerehere. Any commands for Scotland, Miss Campbell? May I take tidings of you to your cousins? It would be a great pleasure to them—and I may say to me."

Miss Campbell looked at him seriously.

"Mr. Fane," she said, "I don't pretend to know what you mean by talking of my cousins, who, after all, are but distant relations upon whom I have no claim."

"What I mean is to please you, of course," said Fane, with a laugh. "What else? If they were my people I should like friends to talk of them to me."

"If that was all! But I do not forget my position; and—when a gentleman sets himself to flatter a lady in my position—"

"Flatter! Do you think it flattering to remind you of your relations? It might be so to them," said Fane, with a bow and a smile. "Never mind, I shall hold my tongue another time if you don't like the Stormaway people. In the meantime I must really say goodbye. Goodbye, Miss Tremerehere. I will tell Miss Meadows I saw you. And Miss Campbell, you will surely shake hands with me, and wish me luck among the grouse."

"Now, if one could only tell what that young man meant!" said Miss Campbell, when he was gone. "He seems well-bred and agreeable, but he may have a motive of his own. Vera, it is the hour for Rollin. Get your book, my dear."

CHAPTER XII ROMANCE

AFTER this there followed a very exciting interval to Vera. Fane came again with another mission (nominally) from Miss Meadows, and was tolerably received. Emboldened by this, he came a third time and a fourth, addressing most of his conversation to Miss Campbell, and describing in elaborate detail the long series of accidents which delayed him from the grouse. The Tremereheres themselves generally left town in the beginning of August, but this year were later than usual. Miss Campbell found it agreeable to the whole to receive so unusual a visitor, and to hear so much about the Campbells of Stormaway, whom she really began at last to believe in as her cousins. He had always some trait to relate of one or other of them when the conversation flagged, or she began to look suspicious. Vera did not know whether she was happy or not during these visits. He gave her now and then a look, now and then a whispered word in the intervals of his talk with Miss Campbell, and left her in no doubt as to his motives for cultivating with such extreme assiduity that lady's friendship; but after all, at sixteen, it is but an indifferent pleasure to see your proper slave devoting himself to another person even if it be for your sake. Vera sat silent, and now and then felt somewhat sad. But her whole life became absorbed in these visits. She thought of them all day long. She expected him till he came, mused upon him after he was gone. Except Rollin and the lessons it was all that Vera had. Her mother wrote to her less frequently than usual, and more briefly. Mrs. Tremerehere for her part, was involved in great anxiety and trouble. "I am rather unhappy about an idea Eddy has got into his head," she wrote, as an excuse for her short letters, "but I trust it will not come to anything." Vera scarcely asked herself what this could be. She was lost in her own excitement.

One afternoon Mr. Tremerehere came in a little earlier than usual, and met Fane, who was leaving after a prolonged call. They stood talking together for a few minutes at the door, and Mr. Tremerehere was heard to laugh, which took a burden off the minds of both the ladies in the drawing-room; for it suddenly occurred to Miss Campbell that before she knew Mr. Fane, and was aware how well he was acquainted with the Campbells of Stormaway, she, too, had been a little suspicious of him, and thought him an undesirable visitor. However, nothing could be more friendly than Mr. Tremerehere's tone. When he came in, however, he did not look quite so genial. He gave a half angry glance at the governess, and a doubtful one at Vera.

"Since when has young Fane become a visitor in the house?" he asked, and there was something uncomfortable in his voice.

"Since when? I think Mr. Fane dined here first on the evening of the match."

"I beg your pardon, that was not what I was asking. Since when has he been in the habit of calling here? He is not an acquaintance of mine. Elinor Meadows, who always has a cottage of young fellows about her, brought him; she takes him everywhere. How often have you seen him, Vera? I don't want him here."

"How often?" Vera's foolish face began to flush as usual, though she would, she thought, have given everything she had in the world to prevent it. This made her father very angry, who liked a prompt and plain reply.

"Yes. How often? What are you frightened about? I shan't eat you; give me a straightforward answer. How often have you seen him here?"

"I—I met him—at mamma's," said Vera, under her breath.

"Ah! at your mother's? So she has taken him up, too."

"I ought to say it is my fault, not Vera's," said Miss Campbell. "He knows some cousins of mine in Argyllshire, the Campbells of Stormaway. He has come to talk to me about them. Vera has seen very little of him," the governess added, with a little complacency, for indeed it had pleased her to feel that the visitor's conversation had been so much addressed to herself.

"Oh! that is it, is it?" he said, rather carelessly, "then perhaps you will not mind giving him a hint that I don't care

for his visits. There is not much in him, and his relationship to Lord Fanebury scarcely worth counting. Perhaps you might hint to him that if he calls again you are not likely to be at home."

"Surely, if you wish it," said Miss Campbell, though she was not pleased. As for Vera, a great blackness of darkness came over her. She had not always liked it when he came; but to lose him, to have no longer that piquant centre to her days, that something to dream of, to think of—what could she do? Vera felt that it was intolerable. At dinner she was too unhappy to preserve her usual composure. She was irritable in her suffering; so irritable as to move her father to the idea that she must be ill, and must go to the seaside, for which he issued his orders on the spot. She had never, since the days of her childhood, been so courageous before.

"I don't want change of air," she said. "It is all very well, I just wish I could," cried Vera. I am so sick, so sick of myself! Let me go to Aunt Elinor, or to the villa; or let me stay at home."

Mr. Tremerehere watched her with some astonishment. "I did not give your mother credit for so much discrimination," he said. "She warned me you had a temper. The seaside is far the best for you. When you are a few years older, you can visit your friends, too, and enjoy yourself."

Vera said nothing. She sat still, with flushed cheeks, excited and miserable, not trusting herself to look at any one. It seemed to her that she must strike a blow for her own deliverance, or die. For the first time in her life she waited after Miss Campbell had left the room, and going up to her father, put her hand timidly on his arm. "Papa," she said, imploringly, "when you go away don't leave me alone with Miss Campbell. Let me go to—the villa; or to Aunt Elinor—"

"Why will you give Miss Meadows that absurd name? She is not your aunt."

"I beg your pardon, papa, I will not do it again. I should be so much happier if I were not alone. The—villa? Mamma will not mind having me, and Eddy and I could be together, if only for a little while. I should be so good—so good and obedient—"

"And why should you not go to the seaside with Miss Campbell this year as well as every other year? Go away, go away, and don't let me hear any more of this."

Vera went away as he told her, without another word, without a look. She passed Miss Campbell, who was waiting and wondering on the staircase, and hurried to her room. She could not cry this time, her eyes were too hot and dry. Oh, why was she so different from other girls! Why had she not a mother to care for her, some one who would see what was happening, who would judge for her if she was wrong, who would not have left her to make Oswald Fane the centre of the world; he was the centre of the world, she felt it now!—the pivot upon which all that was worth having in life turned. If he was sent away, forbidden the house, what was to become of her? Either she would kill herself, or God would be kind and do it for her—one way or other, she must die.

Her heart beat so wildly that it made her sick and faint. But all at once as she sat down it gave one big jump, and then was still. Why was this? Before her lay a letter carefully placed upon her little prayer-book, where she could not missee it. Vera knew at once what it was. Not from her mother, Eddy, any ordinary correspondent; from him. She did not know his handwriting. Why should it be from him? Perhaps it was some childish invitation, somebody's letter whom she did not care for. Saying this over to herself with trembling lips, and knowing it was not true, she opened the note, and with another big jump of her heart read as follows:—

"I met your father to-day as I left the house. He was not rude to me, but I read my doom in his eye. I am not to be allowed to come any more. I shall come—I shall leave no chance untried; I will try to see him, and plead my cause with him; but I know how it will end, unless you, my alone, you who are my better life, will stand by me. Is it too much? Ah, I know it is too much. I have no right to disturb your young life, to bring painful questions into it; but I am in despair; and you, you too—sweet Vera, you for whom I would give my life, you are not happy either. But for this I would go away; I would trust to time and Providence to bring me back to your feet, where alone I can be happy. But to know that you are lonely and in trouble too—that is what I cannot bear. Vera, darling, forgive me, write me one word, only one word, and do not let them separate us. Have pity upon me! Since the first day I saw you, that white day, I have had no thought but you."

"O. F."

Vera read this with feelings I cannot describe. There had never been a word of love-making between them, so to speak, nothing but those vague suggestions which make the early paths of love so exquisite; but after this letter there could be no further disguise. She read it over and over again with a mixture of heartrending pain and delight, one as delicious as and heartrending as the other. Stand by him? what else could she do?—for he was her life if she was his; but write to him! How could she do that? How she trembled, how sore her heart was, how happy! Out of the despair and blank hopelessness with which she had left the dining-room, what a change to this sea of emotion, so sweet, so terrible, so alarming, yet consolatory! Neither father nor mother had any sympathy for Vera, any feeling for her feelings; but he felt for her, with her, everything she felt—yet but for her would be as much alone as she was; they were two against the world. But write to him! The thought trembled all through her, made her hand shake, and her heart beat. Could she do it? How could she do it? When she heard a sound at her door she thrust the letter away, not into her bosom, which would have been romantic, but into her pocket, which was natural; and, conscious in every look and breath and movement turned round to see who it was; fortunately it was only Mary, the daughter of her old nurse, who had lately been promoted to be Vera's maid. Mary was over twenty, an experienced young person, who had "kept company" for many years with a tall Guardsman to whom she was faithful through many flirtations on both sides. She knew what it was to have had parents and a troublesome cook to interfere with the course of her true love; but even cook was not so bad as Miss Campbell. And to have Miss Vera's little heart broken and her young man driven to despair was not a thing which could be allowed to be, if sympathetic Mary could

prevent it. She came into the room smiling, with a consciousness equal to Vera's own, but with more comfortable sensations. Mary was cautious, however, in her advances. She said nothing until she was well into her pretty work of brushing Vera's long beautiful hair, standing behind her, unseen and unseeing, a position which gave both maid and mistress ease. When this period had arrived Mary said softly, "Miss Vera, I hope you had your letter?"

"Yes, Mary," said Vera with a start, and seized a book on the table under pretence of reading. But Mary was not so dull as not to see the warm colour that came flushing over the girl's neck, or the tremulous instinct of self-defence which made her seize upon the book which she did not read. Mary had the matter in her own hands. She resumed—

"How long your hair do grow to be sure, Miss Vera. Mother was always proud of your hair; and now here's somebody come as thinks more of it than coined gold. You'll write him just a little word, won't you, Miss Vera, dear, to keep up his heart, poor gentleman? Just a little word—"

"Mary, you ought not to speak to me so. What have you to do with gentlemen, or me either? How did you get it? Was it you that put it there? Oh, Mary, you shouldn't have done it—you must never, never do it again."

"Miss Vera, you don't know nothing about it," said Mary. "Me, I've kept company with my young man since I was just your age, and nobody shan't come between him and me. We've got to wait, but I don't mind waiting, and I've told mother so, when she's been at me about it. But look you here, Miss Vera, your papa is the only one you've got to look to, and if you hold out he'll give in. They always does. I never see a young gentleman more deep in love, and to give him up would be a burning shame."

"Oh, Mary, how can you, how dare you talk so?" said poor Vera with her face burning. "What would become of us both if papa or Miss Campbell knew?"

"They couldn't do much harm to me, Miss," said Mary. "A servant as knows her work is always sure of a good place. Don't you be afraid for me. And they can't harm you neither, not if you holds out. Whoever holds out wins, them as gives in is the only one as is beaten. Miss Vera, you've got a spirit of your own, for all they think they have broken it. If I were you I'd write him a word just to keep up his heart, poor gentleman; and I'd up and tell my papa that he might be a Bluebeard or a raging Turk as much as he likes—it wouldn't make no effect upon me."

"Oh, Mary, Mary, hush! You don't know what you are saying!"

"Don't I just? It's you as don't understand, Miss, not me. I know all about it, and a deal more than you do, and this I'll say that no father nor tyrant would ever make me false to my young man. I wouldn't do it, not for the world; and Miss Vera, I can't believe as you're a traitor in your heart."

This was such a totally new view of the question that it took away Vera's breath. A traitor! She had never once thought of treachery in the question. How long Mary's arguments went on I need not say. She came back stealing into Vera's room in the dark after Miss Campbell had been there, and declared the girl to be feverish, and had given her some white homeopathic globules, to calm her down again. "It is the hot weather," Miss Campbell said to herself, never suspecting Mary. And the maid stole back in the dark, and the little mistress cried and let her talk, happy yet ashamed of the company and the confidences, and the familiarity and sympathy. Mary pleaded so well that Vera was persuaded to write half a dozen words, in great trouble and agitation, to the effect that Mr. Fane must not be unhappy, that he must not think of her; but that she should always think of him, and pray for him, and hoped he would be very happy all the same. Was it wrong? Was it very wrong? Should not a girl answer a letter from a gentleman as well as from another girl? Vera knew, alas, that this was not at all the question. But she read over Fane's letter again, and put it under her pillow when she went to sleep. He was the only one who felt for her. They two stood against the world!

CHAPTER XIII. AN ANXIOUS MOTHER.

MRS. TREMENEHERE had spent a very uneasy month no less than her daughter, but in a way which had no glidings of romance and happiness like Vera's trouble. The holidays had come, but had brought no pleasant wanderings, no genial ease to her. She had not gone to Switzerland as she had proposed. Edward, disturbed and excited as he was, had declared himself quite indifferent to Switzerland. "If there is to be nothing but play in my life I may as well play here as anywhere else," he had said, with a gloomy ill-temper quite unusual to him; and he had spent the sunny weeks of August in trudging about from one cricket match to another, an occupation which his mother sighed over, without enjoying that kind of honour and glory which consists in the report of "scores" in the *Field*. These, it is to be supposed, gave some consolation to him, but they did not cheer her, especially as they were diversified by long and painful debates with her son on the subject which he had never put aside or relinquished for a moment. Edward had changed his nature altogether. From a docile amiable lad, ready to accept her guidance and to be kind to everybody around him, without standing upon his own will, he had changed into a dogged monomaniac, a being of one idea, thinking of nothing but the project which had taken possession of his generally dull imagination, and set it all aflame. When a slow and tranquil mind gets roused into fanaticism the result is much more serious than with an inflammable nature; the fire takes deeper hold, and burns with a more concentrated and obstinate force. Edward could think of nothing but this idea of his. He too began a correspondence essentially as clandestine as Vera's, though his letters came openly by the post. The boy was free from surveillance, and therefore had no temptation towards communications absolutely secret; but Edward wrote letters to his new friend the traveller which he would not for worlds have shown to his mother, and which were full of plans and engagements which she neither knew nor sanctioned. The expedition was to set out in October, and the mind of Mr. Buckram was not disturbed by the fact that his young convert, his eager disciple, was forming plans and pledging himself to acts of which his friends disapproved. Men look leniently upon such kinds of family treachery. Poor Mrs. Tremenehere felt that the world would be against her when she set herself in opposition to an enterprise which would leave her desolate, and throw away as she thought her son's better life. "Did she expect to keep him always at her apron strings?" she already heard people say, and Edward himself, all the more that he was very bright, took up with fervour that common notion. "You know, mamma," he said, "if I were a girl it would be

quite different; but I can't stay by you always, can I? You would not like to see me stick fast at home, a poor creature like Tom Crabbe, always thinking of the danger of wet feet."

"You know I do not wish for anything of the sort," said Mrs. Tremenehere.

"No, you are not foolish like that; but is it not something of the same kind in a more sensible way? You don't mind my cricket, and that sort of thing. You would let me go up Mont Blanc—all for my amusement. You wouldn't have me laughed at for your anxieties. I know, mother dear, you are a great deal too wise and good for that. But when I want to throw myself into real work, into something that will be of use in the world, then you turn round upon me, you who have always been so good, and refuse because it is so far away, because it is such hard work—"

"Eddy," said Mrs. Tremenehere, "it is always a bad thing to attribute low motives to other people—even people much less near to you than I am. Can you not conceive it possible that I have some better reason than even regret to lose you and anxiety about the hardships involved? I don't say all the same that these would not be reason enough—"

"What reason?" said Edward. "I don't know what other objection there could be."

"To me it would seem like throwing away all your chances," said his mother. "I don't mean only of success in the world; that is important enough, Eddy, though you shake your head. If any misfortune was to happen, if our investments were to go wrong, for instance, like so many people's, you might have the strongest of inducements to think of success in the world. Money never comes amiss, as everybody will tell you—nor friends."

"You too, mamma!" cried Eddy, "is self-interest then the only rule—make friends to help one on in life, as my father said."

"Your father knows more of the world than either you or me—yes, to help you on, and to be helped on in turn—all true assistance is mutual; but I did not think of that," said Mrs. Tremenehere. "What I was thinking was this—that you will throw yourself out of all the reasonable chances of life if you go on with this mad notion, and separate yourself from all your friends, and give up everything—prospects, occupations, suitable companions—all for what? For what, Eddy?"

The lad's face flushed. "For the good of mankind," he cried. "Oh yes, I know what you will say, mother! you will say that is too vague, too general, and means nothing. I can't help that, I can't bring it down to details. Africa is swarming with millions of poor creatures who know nothing; it is to bring civilisation to them, and education and trade, to raise them above the possibility of slavery; why are they slaves except because they are too ignorant and debased to know better? Think, mother—is not that of greater use than anything a fellow like me could do at home? I am not clever, you know I am not clever—but that will not matter in Africa; so long as one is strong and honest and honourable."

"Oh, Eddy, Eddy!" cried his mother in despair, "what am I to say to you to dispel this illusion, my generous, good boy!"

"I will tell you what you can do, mother dear," he said, coming up to her, putting his arms round her, "let me go! My heart is set on it; why should you not let me go, mamma? you never refused me anything before. I know very well I have often disappointed you; you would have liked me to be clever, to take a high place in school, to gain prizes and things—but you have never blamed me when I failed, never! You have given in to me in many a thing you did not care for, because you saw I cared for it. Oh, don't think I haven't seen it! I knew it well enough. You have never reproached me, nor refused me anything. Mother, don't turn round for the first time in my life, and refuse me now; don't fail me now, the first time when it has been really important, when I have wanted it most!"

"You ought to see the difference," said poor Mrs. Tremenehere; "I have been ready to give in to you even when I did not approve, when it was of no great importance; but now, when it is of the last importance, when all your more serious interests are involved, how can I go against my own judgment for the mere sake of pleasing your fancy, Eddy? You ought not to ask me, and I—I ought not to listen."

"I cannot see that," he cried. "I don't see why you should depart from the way you have always treated me. As for me, don't suppose this is a mere fancy," he added, growing red; "it is a fancy I will never depart from; you may oblige me to put it off, but I will give it up never."

Some one fortunately came in then, and stopped the further discussion; but such conversations took place daily between the mother and son, and the reader may judge how painful they were, and confusing to the mind of Mrs. Tremenehere, who had gone all these years on the principle that to yield all legitimate gratification to her son was the best mode of education, and to place in him unlimited confidence. It had answered very well up to this moment. Edward, who knew that he would not be opposed in any innocent and natural wish, had been less, not more, exacting, than many others more strictly governed; but now, what was she to do now? To preserve the tradition of her theory without its spirit, to yield to him for his own destruction, as she had yielded to him for his innocent pleasures. To refuse and cross him—how hard it was! but to consent to what she thought his ruin, that was harder still.

It was while Mrs. Tremenehere was involved in this painful controversy, not knowing what was to be the end of it, that she received suddenly a letter from Elinor Meadows, telling her about the love of Oswald Fane for Vera. The letter was long and full of details, recounting the efforts which the young man had made to see Mr. Tremenehere, and gain his consent; and how failing in this he had appealed to her to intercede for him with Vera's father, and how this, too, had failed; proceedings which had been taking place in the meanwhile. I scarcely know by what rule it is that a youthful love story bulks so much more largely in the eyes of an unmarried woman, who may be supposed to have had no such experiences of her own, than in those of a married woman, who must of necessity, one would imagine, have herself passed through some such passages; but so it is generally, and Mrs. Tremenehere was no exception to the rule. Her own trouble seemed to her much more serious than any folly about love, which no doubt Elinor had put into the children's heads. But though she was impatient she wrote to Vera, telling her she was too young, much too young, to think of any such thing, and that her first duty was to please her father, and give up anything that he thought improper for her. When, however, Mrs. Tremenehere had written this letter, it occurred to her, with a kind of whimsical variation, that it was exactly the kind of letter which her husband would probably write to Eddy when he knew of the controversy in which they were engaged, and this idea made her think again, preoccupied as she was, of her poor little woman-child, left to Miss Campbell's sole society, in all the tremors and distresses of that fanciful moment,

when Love and all involved in it had been first suggested to her mind. Poor Vera! Would her father be gentle, as he ought? Would not she now feel deeply and doubly what it was to be without a mother? Mr. Tremenehere's mind, withdrawn from Vera by the immediate vexations which were more near to her, awoke to this all at once with that sudden, painful sense how much she was herself to blame for depriving Vera of a mother, which gives double force to every pang. After a day or two, during which, amid all her own troubles, this painful question kept returning perpetually to her mind, she decided at last to write to her husband. She must not interfere, but yet perhaps he would be glad to have his wife's assistance at such a moment, as she would be glad to have his. Accordingly, in the beginning of September, when all her own anxieties were growing greater day by day, she took the final resolution, and wrote to him as follows, wording her letter as carefully as if she had been writing to the Queen:—

"DEAR CHARLES,—I don't know whether you begin to find out as I do, how very much more difficult it is to manage children when they are grown up, and begin to have fancies and opinions of their own, than when they are small and can be commanded without explanation. I am sorry to say I have made this discovery in a disagreeable way. Eddy, all at once, without rhyme or reason, has fallen in love with a life of adventure, and gives me no peace, trying to wring from me a consent to let him go off to Africa with Mr. Buckram Bass's expedition. Perhaps a few words from you would help to make him more reasonable, if you would take the trouble to write to him. He is so good a boy in every other respect that it is very painful for me to be obliged to cross him; and yet I am sure you will agree with me that on this point it would be weakness and almost wickedness to yield to his wishes."

Elinor Meadows has written me some remarks about Vera and a lover. A lover at her age! I hope it is only one of Elinor's many delusions in respect to this favourite subject, and that our dear little girl's mind has not yet been disturbed by any such ideas. I know this is the time you appropriate to relaxation, and it has occurred to me that if Vera has known of this proposal, and has been at all upset by it, you may dislike leaving her in the sole companionship of Miss Campbell, who, though I don't doubt a most admirable person, does not look very sympathetic. If this should be the case would you trust her to me? I should, I need not say, take the greatest care of her, and preserve her from every suggestion of premature love-making; her company would be very good for Eddy, who is in an extremely unsettled state of mind, and it would be very sweet and delightful for me. I hope, too, you might find it a relief to your anxiety to dispose of Vera comfortably with me while you are absent. Pray give me your advice on the other subject. With love to Vera,

"I am, ever affectionately yours,
"ADA TREMENEHERE."

Mrs. Tremenehere received this letter just as he was arranging his plans to send his daughter to the seaside. It was an unfortunate moment. More difficult to manage! No, he would not acknowledge anything of the kind. For a girl at least it was always the best way to command without explanation. He thought but little of what his wife said about Eddy, which no doubt was so much dust thrown in his eyes to blind him to the real meaning of the proposed interference—as if he was to be taken in so easily! He answered this letter by return of post. He was angry with Elinor Meadows for her interference, and angry that his wife should know anything about it. They should all find that he was quite able to manage Vera and Vera's lover without any help from them. The answer he returned was as follows. It was not by any means so carefully written as the epistle to which it was a reply:—

"MY DEAR ADA,—I am very sorry that you find any difficulty with Eddy after all the indulgence you have shown him. Of course I shall be quite ready to write and point out his duty to him if you think there is really any necessity for such a step; but I should hope he has not been spoiled to such an extent that he has not sense to see what a fatal piece of absurdity this would be. It is really too ridiculous and too entirely out of the question, I feel sure, to warrant any serious alarm."

"As for Vera, I am very much obliged to you for volunteering to take her off my hands, but up to the present moment I have seen nothing in her to make such a transference necessary. I have no doubt the system upon which she has been trained will continue to answer perfectly, as it has done hitherto, and neither Vera nor I have found anything wanting in Miss Campbell as a companion, though I am aware you don't like her. That perhaps was to be expected. Vera is quite well, and goes to Worthing with her admirable friend and governess the day after to-morrow. Thanking you all the same for your kind offer, and with love to Eddy, who I trust by this time has come to his senses, I am, my dear Ada,

"Affectionately yours,
"C. TREMENEHERE."

This letter was very irritating to Mrs. Tremenehere. Her services were not only rejected, but rejected with something like contumely, and the suggestion that it was to be expected she should dislike Miss Campbell made her furious. Why should she dislike Miss Campbell? It was all she could do to refrain from falling upon Elinor Meadows, who had come to her the night before it arrived, while she was still entertaining the hope of being permitted to have her child with her. "She is not coming, she is going to Worthing with Miss Campbell," she said; and magnanimously swallowed the other words which were fair to come.

"Ah!" cried Miss Meadows, with a start of interest. She was on Oswald's side, and delighted to feel that she should be able at once to give him news as to where his little lady had been taken; for to be sure she was ignorant of Mary, and all that went on through Mary's means.

And thus poor Vera's affairs drew to a climax. Oswald Fane, I need not say, followed Miss Campbell and her charge to Worthing, where twice over by Mary's help he saw Vera in the early morning before Miss Campbell was out of bed, when the girl went out for a walk—as it was so natural she should do—with her maid. But on the last of these two interviews Fane had lost all idea of prudence or patience. It was not only that he was hotly in love, and kept from all legitimate intercourse with the object of his impetuous young affection; but Mary, with whom he was now in constant communication, and whose head was turned by the delight and excitement of the whole transaction, drew such a touching picture to him of Vera's solitude and semi-imprisonment that Fane's blood boiled, and it seemed the first duty to deliver her.

"She ain't found out as Miss Vera is up early of a morning, not yet," said Mary, "which it is my young lady's only breath of freedom; but you'll see she will afore long, for there's spics all about. Mercifully she's fond of her bed in the morning, is

his wife and his son had left him, he wandered over the house in a curious languor of fatigue which blunted even his anxiety. The pretty house, all still and vacant, the broad rich landscape

Had Mr. Tremmenheere been in better spirits he would have laughed; but, fortunately for Eddy, he was not in good spirits. He was worn out and depressed, and amiable as perhaps he had never been before in his life. "My dear Ned," he said gently, in the darkness, rousing all the lad's hopes by the softness of his tone, "whether I might have agreed or disagreed with your

mother scarcely matters in this instance. I am afraid it will be a disappointment to you if you have so set your heart upon it; but the fact is, there is to be no expedition to Africa under the charge of Mr. Buckram Bass. That very clever man is supposed by some people to be too clever. The Geographical Society will not give him a grant, neither will Government; and his expedition has melted into thin air. No one will go with him to Africa for many a day."

"But I heard from him on Monday, about the vacancy," cried Edward with a gasp.

"Then he must have had some plan in his head for equipment, by which he could make something," said Mr. Tremeneere. "I cannot be mistaken, you know, in my position; and so you may make it up with your mother, and relieve her mind as soon as you choose." Then moved by an amiable impulse, —for the boy pleased him—he added, "I am very sorry for your disappointment, Ned."

"Oh, it does not matter," cried the lad, with a great gulp of self-control. Dark waters of bitterness surged up into Edward's eyes, but fortunately the darkness concealed them. And acting on an English boy's savage code of honour, he made a brave effort at once to talk of other things, and covered the stab he had got. No word should any one hear more on the subject from his lips with his will. The pain stung him like that Spartan fox; but, like the boy whom it devoured, he would rather die than complain.

And here Mr. Tremeneere was of more use to his son than the boy's mother would have been. She would have felt the sting for Edward as sharply as he felt it for himself. She would have lavished a thousand sympathetic tendernesses upon him to make up for his suffering. His father did nothing of the sort. For one thing he did not truly realise how great the blow was; but he was sorry for the disappointment—said so once, and was done with it; and talked about other things, forcing Eddy to answer him, and helping him to keep down the pain. But, poor fellow, he had a bad night of it when it was too late to sit up any longer. It obliterated Vera from his mind, and all his anxiety about her. Vera was but a stranger to him after all; and this was so close a misery, and so near!

The father and son made but a miserable breakfast next morning. "I must get off to town, I cannot delay longer," said Mr. Tremeneere. "When you consider where that unhappy child may be—what may be happening to her,—perhaps at that fellow's mercy, confound him! No, no, I can't stay,—don't ask me. Your mother must have no news, or she would have telegraphed before now."

"I am quite ready, sir," said Edward. They were both of them pale and miserable; and Mr. Tremeneere, forgetting already Edward's own share of trouble, was touched by this supposed sympathy. "You don't know much of your sister," he said, "I will not forget, my boy, how you've thrown yourself into it. Please God, when we find her we'll be a more united family. Ned, she and you will have to help me with your mother. She is a proud woman, but for my part I am not proud; and I

don't mind making a sacrifice if only—God help us!—we could find the child."

"We shall find her!" cried Edward, this time with a rush of real sympathy which came to his eyes, and made them shine; and though Mr. Tremeneere knew that Edward's confidence was without foundation, it cheered him as the foolishhest consolation sometimes does. He grasped his son's hand with a tremulous yet strenuous grasp.

"Come along," he said; "I know it is too early for the train, but somehow it is easier to endure one's self when one is in motion. It feels like doing something. Your mother has the best of it staying in town. What a pretty place she has made of this! What a fool I was—good heavens! what an ass! when she asked it, not to let her have the child here!"

"Don't think of that now, sir," said Eddy with feeling. "Come out into the garden in the meantime,—the air will do you good." He was very sorry for his father. He led him through the little space which had been planted so cleverly, and showed him the points of view, upon which they both looked with pre-occupied eyes. It wanted half an hour yet to the time for the train, and the station was not ten minutes' walk. Then Mr. Tremeneere remembered a note he had to write, and they went back into the house that he might do it. He sat down at his wife's writing table, and used the paper with her monogram. How strange that the recollection should dart on him then of another time when he had done this,—when he had taken a pretty sheet with "Ada" emblazoned on it, to write to his sister of the engagement between Ada Langdale and himself! Curious moment for such a reminiscence; but the man was weakened with much unusual feeling, and he stopped to recollect it. "I think it must be a good sign," he said half to himself; "once I took her paper before—"

He was interrupted by a touch on his shoulder, and jumped up, nearly upsetting the paraphernalia of the writing table. "Charles," said his wife, taking him by both hands, "I went to our house last night, where you took me when we were married; and there, at home, where she ought to be, and where I ought to have been all this time taking care of her,—I found the child!"

"God bless you, Ada!" he cried, with a sudden great sob, forced from him by the surprise and the joy. And then he made a blind clutch at her, his eyes being full, and got her into his arms. "You have found her,—and I have found you!"

And it was thus that these foolish people ended their matrimonial quarrel. They had had ten years of it, which was certainly enough, and it had not answered. But the reader must not imagine that all the consequences dispersed into thin air when the principals took each other's hands, as Mr. Bass's African Expedition had done. Edward's heart mended after a while, though it was very sore; but it would not have mended so easily had Government and the Geographical Society encouraged instead of making an end of the expedition of Mr. Buckram Bass. And Providence, though it interfered on one side in this way did not interfere on the other to make an end of Oswald Fane. He stood in solid

flesh and blood in the path of the united family, refusing to let all be as it ought to have been. Poor Oswald! it was the wholesome punishment for him to find his bird flown on the very day when he intended to fly with her,—carrying her beyond pursuit or power of any one to touch her. But a thing which has been carried so far can rarely stop there. As soon as she was parted from him, and the terrible spectre of marriage removed out of her way, Vera began to pine for her lover; and her lover began to besiege the heart, soft with penitence and reconciliation, of Mrs. Tremeneere. Between the two they worked so effectually that Mr. Tremeneere, no longer absolute sovereign in Hyde Park Square, but reduced to the safer limits of a constitutional monarchy and a joint throne, had to give in at last; and much less alarmed by the word than she had been a year before, Vera Tremeneere, at seventeen, with all the pomp befitting a lawful ceremony, permitted by all the authorities, married Oswald Fane. I wish it was permitted me to kill the uninteresting elder brother and his little son, and make the young pair master and mistress of the paternal halls at Weathercock; but, partly by her father's influence, partly by that of Lord Fanebury, who came to the marriage and good-humouredly declared the bridegroom to be his very cousin, Oswald got a valuable appointment, and the young pair went to Italy after all; and coming home, settled down very comfortably, and were much happier than the improper and reprehensible beginning of their story deserved;—which is a bad moral, but to change it is beyond my power.

Edward Tremeneere went into his father's office, and became private secretary to his father's chief,—an admirable appointment. In the meantime, however, he was left free for a great deal of travel, and took to climbing mountains, by special grace of Providence, and became a member of the Alpine Club, atoning to himself in his holidays for the responsibility and regularity of his everyday life. Miss Campbell, I am glad to say, had saved enough money to retire upon an annuity, and tortures young girls no more; but she still thinks Mr. Tremeneere's family monsters of ingratitude for not requiring her exertions in saving their child. Mary was dismissed, as she deserved; but I fear surreptitious means were used whereby she was enabled to marry her Guardsman. Everybody had done wrong all round, and which was the one that was to throw a stone? The only person who had a right to do so was Elinor Meadows, who made a speech to the reunited family on the evening of the day on which Oswald was first received among them, and Vera's happiness sanctioned by her parents. Miss Meadows pushed back the vigorous rings of grey hair from her broad forehead and held out her oratorical right hand. "You two old fools," she said, "and you two young ones, I don't know which of you have made yourselves the most ridiculous. I protest against this absurd happiness, which you have no right to. All of you in your turn have come to me in the depths of despair, and employed me to intercede for you. I never did the least good by my attempts. How dare you, without either rhyme or reason, and every law of justice against it, be so happy now?"

THE END.